

# **7. THE STATE FARM PROMOTION COMMITTEE**

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**As reported in column 6, the assembled "mass" voted to form two groups and elected people to carry out the respective purposes.**

**The first was named "The State Farm Promotion Committee" (some called it the "boom committee").**

**George Pierce was elected chair of this committee.**

**The second was "a permanent organization" for the town (Column 8).**

**A Finance Committee was also appointed.**

At least three of the seven man Promotion Committee were graduates of the University of California, the sons of pioneer farmers, and had inherited their wealth from their fathers.

Here we see George Kirk Swingle's prominent role in Davisville affairs.

(Sketch reproduced from Joann Larkey, *Davisville '68*.)

## George Hutton Swingle

Among the larger landowners who settled around Davisville before 1870 was George Hutton Swingle. Born in Frankfort, Kentucky, on July 26, 1825, he was educated in the public schools. He then emigrated to Missouri and crossed the plains with ox-teams, arriving in California in 1853.

In Sacramento he became associated with H. C. Kirk in a freighting business between Sacramento and the mines. This venture was so successful that, in about 1858, the two partners purchased 1,920 acres east of the present State Division of Forestry and Road 105. Swingle managed the ranch and assumed ownership of the property after Kirk's death. He raised grain and stock and operated a dairy of 100 cows as early as 1870. The California Pacific railroad cut the ranch in half, and Swingle Station became a railroad stopping point between Benicia and Sacramento. Today, a sugarbeet-loading facility operates there.

In 1866, George Hutton Swingle, a Democrat, was elected County Supervisor of the Second District, and served four consecutive terms. In 1871 he married Mary Etta Hall, daughter of Erastus and Sophia (Cowles) Hall, who had come to Sacramento from Ohio to join her brother, Gilbert Cowles Hall, and was teaching there. George died on November 1, 1895, and Mary died in 1928.

Their only child, *George Kirk*, was born July 9, 1873. Before 1890 the Swingles lived for a time in Alameda, where George K. was educated. He graduated from the University of California in 1896. After his father's death he helped his mother manage the ranch. He was a member of the Davisville Chamber of Commerce and the State Farm Promotion Committee (1905-1906), the Yolo County draft board during World War II, President of Davis Rotary Club, and director of the Yolo County Farm Bureau.

In 1917 George Kirk Swingle married Eleanor I. Hughson (1876-1968), daughter of Dr. W. A. and Elizabeth Hughson of Sacramento. They had no children.

The original Swingle home, first built in 1858 and enlarged after 1867, still stands east of Davis (northeast of County Road 105 and the railroad).

Mr. and Mrs. B. K. Howat now farm the 567-acre Swingle ranch, which they bought in 1944. They take justified pride in preserving this pioneer residence.

Sketch  
of the  
life of  
Otis  
Wilber  
by  
Joann  
Larkey  
in her  
*Davis  
Enter-  
prise*  
"Port-  
raits of  
the  
Past"  
column



## Portraits of the past

By Joann Leach Larkey

### OTIS B. WILBER OF THE STATE FARM COMMITTEE

Another on the list of seven local citizens who served on the Davisville chamber of commerce's University State Farm Promotion committee in 1905-07 was Otis B. Wilber, who operated the pioneer holdings in the South Putah district developed by his father-in-law, William H. Marden. There are few existing references to the exact role played by Mr. Wilber in helping to establish the new University Farm at Davisville. However, his high standing among his fellow agriculturalists and his family's longtime interest in improved education opportunities were no doubt significant reasons for his appointment to this vitally important committee.

Because he operated a large dairy business, his special interest might have been the new creamery facilities that were to be the first phase of development at the University Farm. The original legislation, introduced in 1902 and vetoed by the Governor, was commonly known as "Senator Diggs' Dairy Bill". The successful University Farm bill of 1905, strongly promoted by Peter J. Shields, received the enthusiastic backing from California's dairy farmers.

The above portrait and biographical sketch of Otis Wilber were published in Tom Gregory's *History of Yolo County*. Written in the language of 1913, his life story is reported as follows:

"There are thousands of men, not the least influential among them whom is Mr. Wilber, to whom California has been the land of opportunity, whose industrious efforts have brought their own merited measure of prosperity. In an exceptional sense Yolo county has presented favorable openings to men of energy and intelligence, for, while great cities do not here rear their lofty structures toward the sky and mines of vast riches do not present their alluring fascinations to the prospector, the rich soil and the genial climate unite to attract the man whose aim is the acquisition of financial independence through the cultivation of the soil. Prosperous farmers are the rule and not the exception in this county (farmers take note!) and their success has given the region a high standing among agricultural communities.

"An investigation of various locations in the west, followed by settlement in Yolo county, convinced Mr. Wilber of the superiority advantages offered by this part of the state and he has had no reason to regret the decision that made him a permanent resident of the vicinity of Davis. Of eastern family and lineage, he was born in Albany county, N.Y., in 1865, and grew to manhood in the same locality, receiving his education in the public schools. Upon starting out to earn his own livelihood he followed the tide of migration toward the west and at the age of twenty-one years became a settler of Minnesota. However, after nine months he decided to push on further toward the setting sun. On the 26th of November, 1886, he arrived in San Diego, Cal., a stranger and wholly without means. However, he was able to secure employment without delay and for two and one half years he continued in the same neighborhood, going thence to Elko, Nev.,...Truckee..." and to a permanent location in Yolo county in 1899. Shortly after becoming foreman of the W.H. Marden ranch he won the hand of his employer's daughter, Susan Annettee Marden, and as the biography states, "in 1900 he was given entire charge of the property. Since the beginning of his superintendency he has made many valuable improvements and has greatly enhanced the financial value of the estate, as well as the annual returns from its cultivation. At this writing the ranch contains five hundred and sixty-seven acres, forty-two acres having been purchased since the death of Mr. Marden (in 1905). More than one-half of the almond orchard has been planted under the direct oversight of the superintendent and there are now sixty acres of the Hatch variety of that product. Some unusually large crops of almonds have been harvested and as the quality is the



OTIS B. WILBER (1865-1953)—A member of Davisville's University State Farm Promotion committee of 1905-06. The above photo from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Marden Wilber, was copied from an original print of a portrait that was published with Otis Wilber's biography in Tom Gregory's 1913 history of Yolo county. Although it is charred around the edges, the photo and numerous other documents of the Marden and Wilber families survived the fire that destroyed "General" William H. Marden's pioneer home in 1943.

best they command the highest market price.

"The sagacious management of the almond orchard represents only a small item in Mr. Wilber's work as superintendent. A vineyard of Muscat grapes embraces twenty-seven acres and demands the most painstaking supervision. One hundred acres are under cultivation to barley and there are thirty-five acres in alfalfa, of which several crops are harvested during the season. The land has been brought to a high state of cultivation and ranks among the finest farms of the county. In addition to the production of grain and care of orchard and vineyard, Mr. Wilber devotes considerable time to the raising of stock. His judgement of stock is accurate and seldom at fault. One hundred head of high-grade cattle may be seen in the pastures, including twenty-five milch cows of the Durham breed. The dairy forms an important part of the ranch activities and the entire output of milk is sold to the state farm at Davis. At present there are about two hundred head of Poland-China hogs on the ranch and the superintendent is such a firm believer in purebred stock that he has paid as high as \$50 for a stock hog, it being his theory, not only with swine but with all kinds of stock, that often the best is the cheapest and that the stock-raiser must consider quality as of vastly more importance than price."

These last words were well heeded by his descendants. Marden Wilber, the only son of Otis and "Nettie" Wilber, his wife and that couple's two children, Phyllis Wilber Haig and Marden Wilber, Jr., still operate "General" Marden's pioneer holdings. The prize-winning El Mar herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle continue to bring recognition of Yolo County and the Davis area.

Otis B. Wilber lived until Oct. 3, 1953. It is interesting to note that the same issue of the *Davis Enterprise* that carried his death notice also included a description of the newly expanded campus which quoted the words of Davis Provost Stanley B. Freeborn. Introduction of the College of Letters and Science, in 1952, brought about some major changes in curriculum and subsequent growth of the City of Davis.

Sketch  
of the life  
of Doctor  
Walter  
Bates by  
Joann  
Larkey in  
her  
Davis  
Enter-  
prise  
"Por-  
traits of  
the Past"  
series



## Portraits of the past

By Joann Leach Larkey

### THE HOMETOWN FAMILY PHYSICIAN

During the forty-six years that Dr. Walter E. Bates practiced medicine in Davis there were few aspects of community life that did not feel his influence. He is universally remembered by old-time Davisites as a fine physician, a civic leader and a highly respected gentleman. His professional career was balanced with dedicated service as a school board trustee, church elder, telephone and Wells Fargo agent and chamber of commerce president.

Records of the Sunset Telephone and Telegraph company indicate that shortly after Dr. Bates established himself in Davisville in 1886, he was in charge of the town's only telephone, a public pay station located in his drug store-office on Olive, or G street. This arrangement apparently continued until 1893.

As the first president of the Davisville chamber of commerce in 1905, Dr. Bates took an active part in efforts that attracted the University State Farm to the Davis area. Subsequently, he became a lecturer in biology at the new agricultural college where he established a high level of student health care that has been carried on by other local physicians since his death in 1934.

For a broad view of Dr. Bates' eventful life, let us refer to some biographical sketches. J.M. Guinn's history of 1906 says of him, "Since inaugurating his professional practice in Davisville in 1887 (1886) Dr. W.E. Bates has become substantially identified with the advance in medical and surgical science in Yolo county, his wide experience, appreciation of the highest tenets of his calling, and advanced ideas on sanitation and general conditions making him an acquisition whose influence and opinion must needs carry great weight. Besides conducting a general practice in Davisville and vicinity Dr. Bates holds official positions in the state, including those of President of the Yolo county Board of Health, District Surgeon of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, President of the Yolo County Medical Society, is a member of the State Medical Society, and ex-President of the California Northern District Medical Society. He is also president of the Davisville Chamber of commerce. He was born July 3, 1860, in Chattanooga, Tenn., and his early professional life was closely interwoven with that of his father, Cicero M. Bates, M.D., for many years one of the foremost physicians and surgeons of San Francisco.

"Walter E. Bates, M.D., was educated in the public schools of San Francisco and in 1881 graduated from the Medical Department of the University of California. Forthwith he stepped into practice with his father, and when the health of the latter began to fail, succeeded to his many patients. Soon afterward he became Assistant Superintendent of the City and County Hospital of San Francisco, and two years later was appointed Surgeon on board a steamer in the Occident and Oriental line, sailing to China, and making two trips. He was then appointed Superintendent of St. Luke's Hospital for two years and in October, 1887, moved to Davisville, succeeding to the practice of Dr. A.C. Collins. In 1896 he took a post-graduate course at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York city, and through the medium of conventions and periodicals keeps abreast of the times to an extent not exceeded by any member of the profession in northern California.

"In Oakland, Cal., Dr. Bates was united in marriage with Eudora T. Hart, April 18, 1896. Mrs. Bates being a daughter of Jackson Hart, formerly (a wagon train scout of the 1850's and) a commission merchant of Oakland, and now identified with land interests at Concord, Contra Costa county. Two children have been born to Dr. and Mrs. Bates, Athene Frances (the late Mrs. George Morell) and Earnestine (who still resides in Carmel...)"

In a special tribute to Davisville businessmen the Enterprise of February 27, 1904 also recounted the details of Dr. Bates' life, noting, "The subject of this sketch has been Davisville's physician and surgeon since 1886. As a practicing physician he has been exceedingly successful and he stands high in the ranks of those who are at the head of this profession on the Pacific coast. Fortunate, more so possibly than she has reckoned, is Davisville in having within her gates, one who is not only qualified in name to practice medicine anywhere in the state, but one who did practice very successfully for five years in San Francisco, the metropolis of California.

"He is never content with good enough but is constantly on the alert for anything new and more effective for the alleviation of unfortunate



WALTER EARNEST BATES, M.D.  
(1860-1934)

DR. BATES served as a family physician in Davis for 46 years, beginning in 1886. He was also elected president of the first chamber of commerce in 1905 and held an appointment as lecturer in hygiene on the Davis campus from 1914 to 1934. This portrait is reproduced from the collection of Dr. J. Homer Woolsey, courtesy of Cowell Memorial hospital, U C Davis.  
ENTERPRISE PHOTO

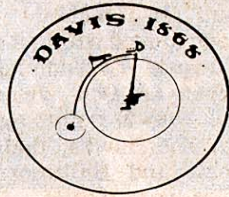
suffering man. He is continuously adding to his office equipment the latest and best of apparatus and surgical implements, recently having added a splendid x-ray of the largest type on the coast, with all the necessary apparatus for its manipulation. We feel safe in venturing the opinion that it is very doubtful if better and more up to date offices can be found in the state outside of the large cities. His enterprise and endeavors exerted in the efforts for these accomplishments of greater things, always in his profession, does not stop there. He is just as enterprising and progressive as a citizen, and is sure to be found in the front ranks of those who are striving for public improvement and is liberal in the advancement of every worthy cause...."

The latter prophecy was more than fulfilled, as was noted in the Woodland Democrat at the time of his death in 1934. The memorial stated, "Dr. Bates had always taken a keen pride in the advancement of Davis and in all civic affairs. He wrote out notices calling together citizens of Davis and community for the formation of a chamber of commerce, which had as its main objective securing the location of the University Farm at Davis. As president of the Davis Chamber of Commerce, he took G. Kirk Swingle with him and appeared before the Sacramento Chamber of Commerce requesting that a road be opened through the tules between Davis and Sacramento. This road (known as the Tule Jake road) was opened, and met with such a hearty response from the traveling public, that the causeway had to be constructed (in 1915) to handle the traffic..."

In 1923 Dr. Bates formed a medical partnership with Dr. Thomas E. Cooper, who moved to California from Missouri at the suggestion of his sister, Mrs. Walter L. Howard. Dr. Howard, for whom Howard way on the Davis campus is named, was a pomologist who also served as Dean of the University Farm for a number of years. Both Drs. Bates and Cooper were associated with health services at the University in addition to their private practice, a tradition which is carried on today by the latter's son, Dr. Thomas Y. Cooper who succeeded Dr. J. Homer Woolsey and his father has served as director of the UCD student health service.

During the last twenty years of his life Dr. Bates saw patients in his second floor office, over the northeast corner of the Bank of Davis at Second and G streets. After living in the former Hunt-Lillard home at 524 Second street for a number of years, the Bates family moved to a home built for them on the northeast corner of Second and C street. The latter residence, now used as legal offices is owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Brinley who previously lived there with their family.

Joann  
Larkey  
sketch of  
Albert June  
Plant in her  
*Davis  
Enterprise*  
"Portraits of  
the Past"  
series



## Portraits of the past

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### ALBERT JUNE PLANT

The man who served as secretary of the committee which help bring the University State Farm to the Davis area deserves special mention in the annals of local history. During 1905-1906, Albert June Plant, a business-man and Notary Public, kept minutes for both the first Davisville chamber of commerce and the chamber's State Farm Promotion committee. The latter group prepared the booklet, entitled "An Ideal For A University Farm," which clearly stated the advantages of selecting the proffered Davisville site for the newly created institution.

Unfortunately, the whereabouts of Mr. Plant's minute books is unknown today. As a result, students of local history are forced to rely on the diary of George W. Pierce, another committee member, and newspaper articles for an accounting of events which influenced the Governor's site selection committee to select the Sparks-Wright-Hamel tract over many other contenders. Minutes for meetings of the Davisville chamber of commerce and the Business Men's association, which were recorded by Mr. Plant's eldest son, Forrest Albert Plant prior to the city's incorporation in 1917, are also missing today. Hopefully, they will be recovered from some attic shelf one day soon.



ALBERT JUNE PLANT  
(June 2, 1859- Dec. 27, 1911)

The Bates and LaRue families as shown in a photograph appearing in Joann Larkey, *Davisville '68*.

This is the only known photograph of Jacob LaRue, who died in early 1906 at age 46, not long after this photograph was taken.



*Charter officers of the first Davisville Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Walter E. Bates (left) and Jacob Eugene LaRue, are pictured, in 1905, with their wives and children in the garden of Arlington Farm.*