

# Homes of Fair Oaks

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## Jones Estate - Now the Governor's

While the Old Homes article typically focuses on one of our historic homes built before 1920, this quarter's article will talk about our history-in-the making as Fair Oaks becomes the home of the Governor of California for the first time in history. December, 2018 Governor Gavin Newsom and family purchased their new home at 6740 Tobia Avenue, on 8 acres on the bluffs overlooking Sacramento Bar. While I am not in his inner circle, I have been pulled into his outer orbit by the fact he is now my neighbor 3 doors away! I thought I would share some of the history of his property, along with my own personal remembrances over the years.

I can only assume the Newsoms were attracted to the rolling oak-studded seclusion of the gated 8 acre Jones Estate, promising a private enclave for their 4 young children to have a sense of normalcy, far from the fishbowl of downtown Sacramento politics. It would be hard to find any other home in the area, with so much privacy. This begs the first question - how did there happen to be such a large beautiful home, close to downtown, on such a large acreage to even consider?



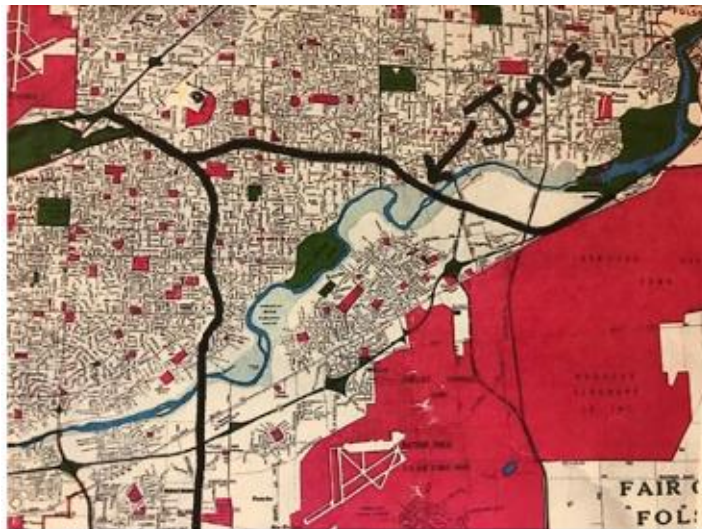
The gated entrance



The originally planned lots of the Southcliff Subdivision, with the current 8 acre Jones Estate lot outlined in red. View Court was never built.

A bit of history. The Southcliff neighborhood was formed in 1967 when the subdivision map was filed showing 62 lots. Previously the historic Kate Smith home, which I wrote about in October of 2018, had presided over the area - the grand dame of the neighborhood. At that time, the map shows View Court extending from the bend of Tobia, looping into the 8 acres, containing 10 of the 62 lots.

In the meantime, plans for a crosstown route connecting Route 80 with Route 50 in two locations had been on the books since 1964 - named Route 244. Originating at today's Auburn Blvd off ramp (can you picture how the 4 lane offramp from I80 simply stubs into Auburn Blvd?), the route would have split near Cypress with one leg extending across the river at Bradshaw, and the other continuing up Fair Oaks Blvd, crossing San Juan Ave, then angling across the (now) Bannister Park near the (now) Waldorf Campus, bisecting Sacramento Bar, and crossing the American River West of the Sunrise Bridge before connecting with Hwy 50. In preparation, in December of 1970, the State condemned the future governor's property, for "State Highway Purposes", reimbursing the owners of the effected lots \$129,000 according to recorded documents.



The proposed Route 244 would have extended through Fair Oaks across the Jones Estate, connecting with Route 50.

1970 and 1971 saw the first sales of the Southcliff subdivided lots, while the public debate over the crosstown route became rather heated as residents around town fought over the upcoming disruption of their neighborhoods. In a move that to this day is remembered as the best decision ever by some residents, and the worst blunder in local transportation history by others, the crosstown route was abandoned in 1975 - during Governor Jerry Brown's first term. In 1979 the 8 acres was sold at public auction. The transfer tax indicates the sales price was \$530,000. I have heard the two main bidders were local developer Robert Powell, and Vern and Gloria Jones - with the Jones emerging as the victors. Jones had been the sole owner of Exploration Logging (ExLog) (a well site geological service company with operations in 26 countries) when it merged with Baker/Hughes in 1972, with a large payout.

Over the next few years, construction began at the Jones estate, designed with 6 bedrooms, 7-1/2 bathrooms and over 12,000 square feet of Mediterranean elegance. My husband Dave and I were building our home up the street at the same time (significantly

smaller I might add) and frequently visited the site to see the latest progress. I had called the county building department once, and mentioning the Jones home, the clerk said it was the largest home he had ever seen come across his desk. At 12,000 square feet it was unusually massive for our area at the time. Today as well!

Vern was described at one point as a “drilling rig roughneck” which makes a memory Dave has of Vern Jones quite fitting. Dave wandered over to the Jones construction site at one point. Walking up the long driveway, he saw a number of men in a trench with picks and shovels. Looking further, one of them was Vern. They had discovered some underground piping, and Vern jumped right in to figure it out - shovel in hand.

Once they moved in, the Jones hosted their first large gathering - a wedding for their daughter, with valets running up and down the street as they parked their guests cars. The gardens were beautiful, with all floral plantings bursting with white flowers. The first few Halloweens I remember the gates were surprisingly opened with candle-lit luminaires lining the long driveway. At the door, a butler (was it a costume?) held a silver tray with treats. That was pretty spectacular.

For the next 35 years the Jones lived quietly in their beautiful estate home, with tennis courts, a pool and pool house, and acres of carefully groomed heritage oaks, although the events of 2003 snapped the neighbors to attention. The Bee reported that then Governor Swarzenegger was looking at “a home off of Southcliff Drive”, presumably contemplating a move for his family. It could only mean the Jones Estate. For the next few days television crews lined the streets of Southcliff Drive and Tobia Way with their cameras waiting to get the scoop. Subsequently, Swarzenegger never bought in the Sacramento area, and the trucks eventually left. But it was wild to think of our neighborhood as home to the Governor of the State! Little did we know.

As it turns out, that was not our neighborhood’s only political connection, however. Do you remember the incident that was brought up in Governor Mitt Romney’s Presidential run about him driving 12 hours from Massachusetts to Ontario with his dog, Seamus, in a crate on top of the car? It was tossed out as an example of his character in both his ‘08 and ‘12 campaign. The dog, Seamus, eventually came to live with Romney’s sister, Jane Romney Robinson, who lived on Tobia Way, 6 doors up the street from Newsom’s new home. (For the record - apparently Seamus loved riding on top of the car, according to the Robinsons.)

Time will tell how the Governor and his family’s move to Fair Oaks will impact our neighborhood, or our town. But one thing is certain. The history of Fair Oaks has taken a sharp turn as the new home of the Governor of California.