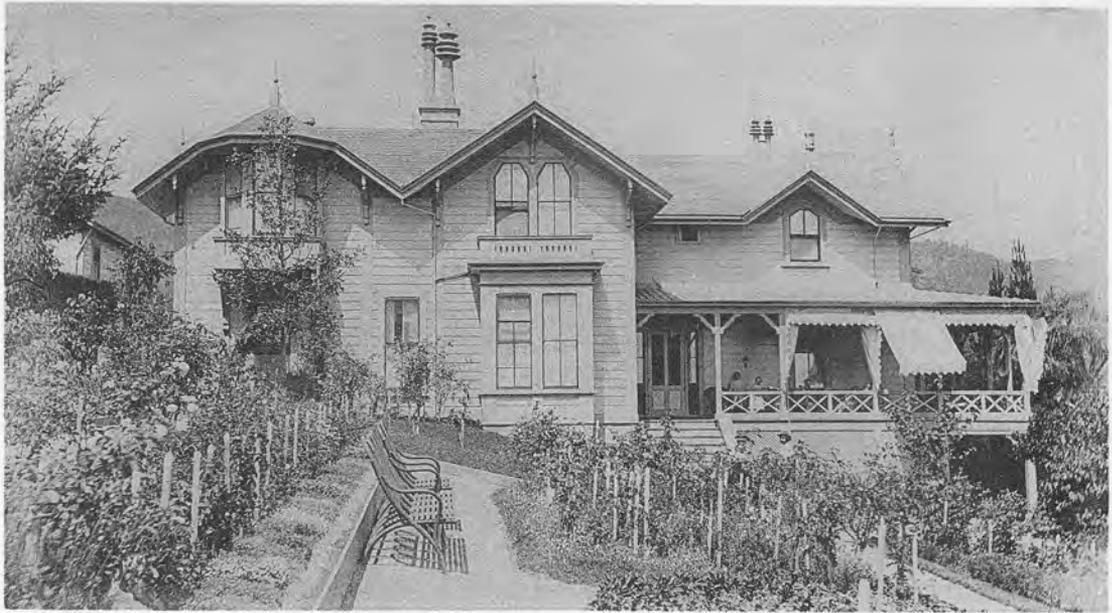




13. LEWIS GERSTLE
Frankfurt, 1875



14. HANNAH GERSTLE
Frankfurt, 1875



15. THE MAIN HOUSE AT VIOLET TERRACE
1885



16. THE HOUSE THAT WAS MOVED DOWN THE HILL



17. HANNAH GERSTLE AND HER ELEVEN OLDEST GRANDCHILDREN IN 1898

	Harold Mack	Edith Mack	
Pepi Lilienthal	Miriam Gerstle	Hannah Gerstle	Adele Mack
May Lilienthal	Max Lilienthal		Arthur Lilienthal
Gerstle Mack	Mark Gerstle Jr.		John Levison



18. LEWIS GERSTLE
About 1900



19. HANNAH GERSTLE
About 1905



20. HANNAH GERSTLE
About 1928



21. SOPHIE GERSTLE LILIENTHAL



22. CLARA GERSTLE MACK



23. BERTHA GERSTLE LILIENTHAL



24. MARK LEWIS GERSTLE



25. WILLIAM LEWIS GERSTLE



26. ALICE GERSTLE LEVISON



27. BELLA GERSTLE FLEISHHACKER

beyond belief. I suppose, however, that we can stand it, and if the fashionable world continue to regard seal skins in the same favorable light as we do for the next 10 years, I don't care what will be worn after that." ⁶

Immediately after receipt of the London cable the yearly dividend was computed in San Francisco by mental arithmetic in a most refreshingly informal manner. The conversation would go something like this:

"Well, Niebaum, I think we can pay \$35 [per share]."

"Yes," would answer Niebaum, continuing to turn over the pages of his newspaper, "that sounds all right." ⁷

And the decision would be ratified at a formal meeting of the trustees after the auction of the skins from the Komandorski Islands had taken place during the following March or April. "After all," commented Louis Greene, "we *were* a corporation!" ⁸

This account of the procedure is more picturesque than accurate. Actually a meeting was held and the dividend decided upon officially within a day or two after the receipt of the Lampson cable concerning the auction of the Pribilof skins in the autumn, and again when the cable announcing the sale prices of the Russian skins and the land furs arrived in the spring.

During the twenty-one-year period from 1872 to 1892 inclusive the average dividend distributed by the company amounted to more than \$1,000,000 a year, a little over 50% of the par value of the stock. Profits did not begin to accumulate until after the sale of the 1871 catch, and to cover expenses an assessment of \$8 per share was levied in 1871. The first dividend was declared in February 1872, and thereafter dividends were paid regularly, usually twice and sometimes three times a year. After the expiration of the fur seal concession in 1890 the company continued to pay large dividends for two more years out of a surplus fund of about \$2,000,000 which was no longer required for current expenses. The list of dividends from 1872 to 1892 follows: ⁹

<i>Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Amount per \$100 share</i>
1	1 Feb. 1872	\$10
2	17 Dec. 1873	10
3	28 Apr. 1874	7
4	19 Nov. 1874	10
5	4 Mar. 1875	15
6	14 May 1875	7.50
7	24 Nov. 1875	15
8	28 Mar. 1876	10
9	4 Dec. 1876	7.50
10	26 Nov. 1877	10

<i>Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Amount per \$100 share</i>
11	27 Mar. 1878	10
12	1 May 1878	5
13	19 Nov. 1878	30
14	19 Mar. 1879	30
15	19 May 1879	5
16	30 Oct. 1879	50
17	10 Mar. 1880	50
18	29 Oct. 1880	50
19	30 Mar. 1881	45
20	2 Nov. 1881	45
21	28 Mar. 1882	27.50
22	24 Nov. 1882	20
23	20 Mar. 1883	17.50
24	1 Nov. 1883	25
25	1 Apr. 1884	25
26	24 Nov. 1884	20
27	1 Apr. 1885	15
28	4 Nov. 1885	20
29	2 Apr. 1886	30
30	29 Oct. 1886	35
31	29 Mar. 1887	30
32	9 Nov. 1887	25
33	28 Mar. 1888	15
34	7 Nov. 1888	35
35	8 Apr. 1889	40
36	7 Oct. 1889	35
37	13 Mar. 1890	50
38	19 Apr. 1890	25
39	3 Nov. 1890	40
40	25 Mar. 1891	20
41	6 Nov. 1891	50
42	11 Feb. 1892	25
43	11 May 1892	25
TOTAL FOR 21 YEARS		\$1072

Chapter V

THE ALASKA COMMERCIAL COMPANY: II

IN JUNE 1871 the offices of the Alaska Commercial Company, together with those of Louis Sloss & Company and Hutchinson, Kohl & Company, were installed in a four-storey building, 310 Sansome Street, at the corner of Halleck Street between California and Sacramento. After this structure was destroyed by fire in April 1906 the company erected a new twelve-storey brick building on the same site, but extending from Halleck to the corner of California and Sansome Streets.

On the ground floor of the old building a long corridor occupied most of the north side, with the main entrance on Sansome Street and a side door opening onto Halleck Street. To the right of this corridor as one entered from Sansome Street was the front office, separated from the corridor by a glass-and-wood partition punctuated by two windowlike openings with small counters. Farther back was the door to the front office, and beyond the door were a small room, afterwards converted into the freight and passenger department, and a large safe or vault. The entire rear or eastern end of the ground floor consisted of one very large room containing a stairway to the upper floors, a freight hoist operated by a rope, and a stove surrounded by a box filled with sand, known inelegantly but accurately as the "spit box." This room was the rendezvous of the company's ship captains and their fellow mariners, who congregated there between voyages and during the winter months when Alaska traffic was at a standstill and exchanged yarns (some true, some wildly imaginative) of hurricanes, pirates, shipwrecks, and sea monsters. Not infrequently the office boys and younger clerks would abandon their chores to listen, goggle-eyed, to these fantastic tales; but unfortunately nobody ever took the trouble to write them down.

The purchasing department, a beehive of activity, was on the second floor, as well as a museum containing household articles, hunting and fishing equipment, skin boats, clothing, and trinkets made and used by Aleuts, Eskimos, and Indians living in various districts of Alaska and the neighboring islands. The company encouraged its traders and employees to buy such objects from the natives, and in a few years this museum became famous as the most complete ethnological collection of Alaskan material in the world. Duplicate specimens were given to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and the company

rendered invaluable assistance, gratis, to scientific expeditions organized by the Smithsonian. The company's collection was subsequently donated to the University of California and thus escaped destruction by fire in 1906.

The third and fourth floors were devoted to the storage of furs. Sealskins were never brought to the building but were packed on the dock onto which they were unloaded from the Alaska steamers and shipped direct to London. All other furs were prepared and packed at 310 Sansome Street, whence they too were shipped to London. From 1870 to 1890 the company was by far the largest buyer of furs, in addition to sealskins, in Alaska. These pelts came from the Aleutian Islands, the Seward Peninsula, the valleys of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, Kodiak Island, and the shores of Bristol Bay and Cook's Inlet. They included an immense variety: the fabulously rare sea otter (700 to 1000 pelts yearly) of which a single skin sometimes sold in London for more than \$1000; ermine, muskrat, mink (not yet fashionable, and worth only \$2 a skin), wolf, wolverine, marten, lynx, beaver, land otter, fox (blue, red, silver, cross, and white), and bear (brown, Kodiak, blue, polar, and black). There were also some sables from Kamchatka and Siberia and a few other commodities such as whalebone and walrus ivory. Naturally the entire building was pervaded by the rank odor of raw fur, mingled with the more agreeable scent of China tea which was stored in fifty-pound chests on the second floor awaiting shipment to Alaska and the islands, where the natives, influenced by Russian usage, consumed it in vast quantities.

All records of the company were kept and all letters written in longhand until 1896, when a newfangled machine called a typewriter was installed.

The front office, lighted by three large windows facing Sansome Street, was occupied by Lewis Gerstle, Louis Sloss, Gustave Niebaum, William Kohl, and three or four clerks. The clerks worked at long tables set at right angles to the corridor partition. Lewis Gerstle's rolltop desk occupied the southwest corner of the room under one of the windows; Niebaum sat at a similar desk near the northwest corner. Between them was a chair for Kohl, and against the side wall near Lewis Gerstle's desk another chair used by Louis Sloss, who needed no desk because he almost literally never wrote a line in the office.

Louis Sloss, short and stocky, clean-shaven except for a short neatly trimmed goatee, always wore a tall silk hat in the office. Lewis Gerstle sported a pair of luxuriant side whiskers and wore a bowler hat with a square crown, a style of headgear rarely seen today except on the head of Sir Winston Churchill. Lewis Gerstle and Louis Sloss worked together in complete harmony for more than half a century, and their family relationship as brothers-in-law was just

as amicable. They understood each other perfectly, yet they were different in many ways. In business Lewis Gerstle was conservative, retiring, modest, punctilious; he avoided publicity, hated to be made conspicuous in any way, and often gave to strangers an impression of coldness and austerity that belied the genial kindness of his real nature. At home, on the other hand, he was demonstratively affectionate to his wife and children, full of laughter and little jokes; and even in the office his habitual gravity was easily upset by an amusing incident or a funny story. Louis Sloss was more daring by temperament, a man of creative ideas and projects who cared little for office routine. Gregarious, exceedingly popular, a good mixer, he played an active part in public affairs and the political life of California.

Although the business of the Alaska Commercial Company occupied most of his time and attention, Lewis Gerstle participated in many industrial and financial enterprises connected with the development of California. He was one of the original promoters of the Union Iron Works in San Francisco, an investor in the Pioneer Woolen Mills and the San Joaquin Valley Railroad, a director of the Nevada National Bank, the Union Trust Company, and the California-Hawaiian Sugar Company, and a stockholder in numerous other California corporations.

He was a staunch Republican but took only a mild interest in politics except when a friend was running for office. In 1880 John F. Miller, president of the Alaska Commercial Company, was a Republican candidate for United States senator from California (before 1913 senators were elected by state legislatures, not by popular vote). "The Democrats had a fine turn out last night," Lewis Gerstle informed his wife on October 30. "We shall do much better however this evening, and the result will manifest itself next Tuesday, when we confidently hope to carry this city by from 1500 to 2000 majority for Garfield, and the state by about 5000. . . . You see I am full of politics and [have] neither time nor inclination to give attention to anything else for the next few days. I am anxious to elect Miller, and feel confident of success." ¹ Garfield was duly elected, only to be assassinated a few months after his inauguration. Miller was also elected, resigned as president of the company, and died in Washington on March 8, 1886 during his first term in the Senate.

Lewis Gerstle enjoyed gambling at cards, sometimes for fairly high stakes, and during his earlier years in San Francisco he may have speculated to some extent in mining and other unstable stocks; but as he grew older he became more conservative in his investments. In 1886 he disapproved vigorously of the wild speculation in the stock of the Consolidated Virginia silver mine, a rich section of the Comstock lode in Nevada, and refused to be tempted by the

prospect (illusory, as things turned out) of enormous profits. "The extraordinary advance in mining shares," he wrote to his wife in December, "based upon supposed developments in the Comstock, and consequent failures of stock brokers, has created the utmost excitement in this city during the entire week. Among the stock operating fraternity you can only find two classes, millionaire or pauper, while the merchants, and the well to do people generally, occupy seats in the gallery. I am inclined to think however, that in a short time there will be considerable shrinkage among the new millionaires, and the pauper congregation [will be] larger than ever." ² Two days later he added: "This place has gone crazy on stocks again, and I presume that as long as there is a dollar left the excitement will keep up. As the only development is in the Consolidated Virginia, the break must come before long. The merchants and men of means have so far kept out, and cannot be affected by it." ³

Among the brokers adversely affected by the flurry in Virginia Consolidated was the firm of Greenebaum & Strauss in which Jacob Greenebaum, Lewis Gerstle's brother-in-law, was a partner. At the beginning of December 1886 this firm, unable to meet its obligations, was suspended by the San Francisco Stock Exchange. Lewis Gerstle mentioned the episode briefly in a letter to his wife, who was in New York, but in accordance with his invariable custom he treated the matter lightly in order to spare Hannah needless worry: "The news of the suspension of Greenebaum & Strauss . . . has no doubt found its way in the press dispatches of today. . . . They have made an assignment, and in a few days we shall know how matters stand. . . . You know that such things cost me no sleepless nights, and I want you not to bother your head about this affair, and . . . simply devote yourself to pleasure among our dear ones." ⁴ Nevertheless he made no secret of his opinion of his brother-in-law's ineptitude: "The suspension of Greenebaum & Strauss may probably result in a 50% loss to their creditors. . . . They [Greenebaum & Strauss] are however not entitled to sympathy. A vegetable stand, with an investment of about \$100 is all that Strauss and Jake are fit to manage. . . ." ⁵ Though the partners had "conducted their business like a lot of children" ⁶ the situation might have been worse; most of the creditors displayed commendable liberality, and the press comments were surprisingly mild. "During all these troubles," Lewis wrote on December 8, "not an unkind word has been said by any of the papers here." ⁷ Next day the news was even better: "Mr. Flood sent for Jake yesterday, and told him that the \$7000 they owe to the Bank should be considered paid, and gave at once orders to the cashier to balance the account. This shows the spirit of generosity towards the firm in this community." ⁸ Lewis Gerstle was deeply moved by gracious gestures of this kind: "Thank God we are living in a country where men

feel for each other, and are ready to do a good act to each other in time of need." ⁹

Yet some of the creditors demanded their pound of flesh, and Lewis Gerstle, in spite of his disapproval of the operations of the suspended firm, had a strong sense of family obligation and dipped into his own pocket to pay off some of the bankrupt partnership's most pressing debts. Jacob Greenebaum's other brother-in-law, Louis Sloss, also contributed generously. "I have just telegraphed you," Lewis wrote to Hannah on December 14, "that the affairs of Greenebaum and Strauss have all been arranged. . . . We have satisfied the blood hounds. Let them have a good laugh over the money they have squeezed out of us. We find our gratification in the knowledge of having done our duty towards a member of our family. . . . My dear Hannah, we are a happy family and no doubt [will] always remain so." ¹⁰ He expected other people to feel equally responsible for their relatives' debts, and when Emanuel Strauss's brother in New York refused to assist the firm financially, Lewis Gerstle was so indignant that he instructed Hannah to sever all social relations with that member of the Strauss family.

William Kohl, who lived with his wife, his daughter Mary, and his son Fred in his country house in San Mateo, appeared in the office only two or three times a month. He always wore a ruby stud in the bosom of his starched shirt. He had a slight limp about which he was extremely sensitive, and walked with the aid of a cane. Once he sulked for six months because Louis Greene, who had cut his foot, temporarily used a cane, and Kohl thought the younger man was deliberately and maliciously imitating him. Kohl kept his personal funds on deposit with Louis Sloss & Company, but being vague about money and having complete confidence in his associates he seldom took the trouble to request a statement. One morning however he asked the cashier, Ben Arnhold (whom he always, for some unknown reason, called "Philip"):

"Philip, how do I stand on the books?"

"About \$29,000, Captain," replied Arnhold, glancing at the ledger.

"Have I got it," asked Kohl, "or do I owe it?" ¹¹

Gustave Niebaum had come to California round Cape Horn as an ordinary seaman in a sailing vessel from Finland, his native country, which was then a part of Russia. For some years he followed the sea, eventually becoming captain of a ship. He spoke several languages fluently, wore a full beard, and cared little for clothes, often wearing the same suit for weeks. Like Kohl he came to the office only at irregular intervals. He traveled a good deal on company business, and when in California he spent much of his time on his ranch near Ruther-

ford in Napa County, where he cultivated grapes as a hobby and made excellent wine.

The office of Simon Greenwald, the purchasing agent, was on the second floor. After his death in the autumn of 1880 his place was taken by Louis Sloss's oldest son Leon, who was in turn superseded by Lewis Gerstle's son William. In the course of time other young members of the family were associated with the firm: Louis Sloss's second son, Louis Jr.; Max Heilbronner, a nephew of Lewis Gerstle's, who served as secretary of the company from 1882 to 1896; and Louis Greenbaum (who dropped one "e" from his surname and later changed his name to Greene), the youngest son of Herman and Rosalia Greenebaum.

Hayward M. Hutchinson lived in Washington, where he acted as the company's representative until his death in May 1883. Lewis Gerstle, who happened to be in New York at the time, went to Washington for the funeral and, through Senator Miller, met some distinguished public officials: "Had the pleasure of smoking & drinking with the President [Arthur] & his cabinet officers during Saturday afternoon, dined at Miller's. . . ." ¹²

Neither Louis Sloss nor Lewis Gerstle ever visited Alaska, but Leon Sloss, Louis Sloss Jr., and Will Gerstle journeyed occasionally to the north to supervise and become familiar with the company's operations in the territory.

The Alaska Commercial Company had the following presidents: Louis Sloss (October 1868 to January 1870); John F. Miller (January 1870 to November 1880); Lewis Gerstle (January 1881 to August 1887); Louis Sloss (August 1887 to June 1892); Lewis Gerstle (June 1892 to November 1902). After Lewis Gerstle's death in November 1902 no president was chosen for more than five years, but Gustave Niebaum, the first vice president, served as acting president until January 1908, when he was elected president. Niebaum died that same autumn, and the succeeding presidents were William L. Gerstle (October 1908 to October 1918); Leon Sloss (October 1918 to 1920); and William L. Gerstle (1920 to 1940).

In 1870 almost the whole of the sealing season had passed before the company secured its lease, so the catch that year was less than 10,000 skins; but it was augmented by several thousand skins taken the previous year by Hutchinson, Kohl & Company and left on the islands. The company acquired these old skins, for which it paid the government a tax of \$1 apiece instead of the \$2.625 levied on fresh skins. During the twenty years of its lease the number of seal-skins shipped from the Pribilofs and the payment to the government for rental and skin taxes were: ¹³

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of skins</i>	<i>Rental and skin tax</i>
1870	9,577	\$101,080.00
1871	99,841	317,082.625
1872	99,975	317,444.375
1873	99,744	316,927.00
1874	99,998	317,494.75
1875	99,976	317,446.975
1876	89,964	291,155.50
1877	75,526	253,255.75
1878	99,980	317,461.39
1879	99,962	317,410.225
1880	100,036	317,594.50
1881	99,766	316,984.75
1882	99,922	317,295.24
1883	75,000	251,875.00
1884	99,962	317,410.225
1885	99,996	317,488.20
1886	99,982	317,467.94
1887	99,950	317,378.725
1888	100,000	317,500.00
1889	100,000	317,500.00
	1,849,157	\$5,975,253.17

In one year—1880—the company apparently slightly exceeded its quota of 100,000 skins, but the 36 surplus furs were presumably holdovers from the previous year. During the twenty-year period the natives killed in addition about 93,000 pups for food, and were paid by the company for killing and skinning the commercial catch (and for some extra labor such as grading streets, at \$1 a day) a total of \$755,672.87. To equalize the earnings of the inhabitants of the two islands, some of the St. George Aleuts worked on St. Paul for part of each season.

From 1871 to 1890 inclusive the company, as agents for Hutchinson, Kohl, Philippeus & Company, took from the Komandorskis and Robben Island 769,863 skins, an average of approximately 38,500 a year. These Russian skins, inferior in quality to those from the American islands, were auctioned off in London each spring, not with the Pribilof consignment in October.

Most of the skins dressed and dyed in London were reimported into the United States, where they were subject to customs duty. From 1870 to 1889 the customs charges on the Pribilof skins amounted to about \$3,625,000 and on the skins from the Russian islands to about \$550,000. These duties, plus the rentals

and taxes paid by the Alaska Commercial Company, brought the total income of the United States government from the fur seal industry alone, in twenty years, to approximately \$10,150,000—about \$3,000,000 more than the sum paid for the whole territory of Alaska. "Seward's Folly" had not been so very foolish after all.

Chapter VI

THE ALASKA COMMERCIAL COMPANY: III

THE AWARD OF the sealing concession to the Alaska Commercial Company in 1870 was bitterly resented by the rival bidders, especially Louis Goldstone and the interests he represented. They claimed that the Secretary of the Treasury had acted unethically and illegally in allowing the company to raise its bid to equal that of its chief competitor, and that the company had used fraud and corruption to obtain preferential treatment. For six or seven years Goldstone and some of the other unsuccessful bidders viciously attacked the company in circulars, pamphlets, and the press, one of their principal organs of vituperation being a small newspaper published in San Francisco, the *Alaska Herald*.

The company was charged with surreptitiously exceeding its annual quota of skins; with illtreating the Aleuts on the Pribilof Islands; with underpaying and overcharging the native trappers who supplied the company with land furs; and with many other assorted misdemeanors. Other newspapers reprinted some of these allegations, and in 1875 General O. O. Howard, stationed at Sitka, sent to the War Department a report condemning the company's treatment of the natives. The general based his denunciation wholly on the press clippings and extracts from pamphlets attached to his report, for he had no first-hand information. The company maintained no trading posts in southeastern Alaska, and Howard had never been within five hundred miles of any company station.

Benjamin H. Bristow, Boutwell's successor as Secretary of the Treasury, sent a special agent, J. S. Moore, to San Francisco to investigate the company's affairs. Moore remained in San Francisco several weeks, examined the company's books and the custom house records, and found no evidence that the company had exceeded or attempted to exceed its legal limit of skins. He did find a discrepancy between the two records of 559 skins in the six years the lease had then been in effect; but he ascribed this slight variation, amounting to less than one-thousandth of the total catch in that period, to the fallibility of the government inspectors on the islands and in San Francisco. Moore reported that no question of dishonesty was involved.

Nevertheless the cumulative effect of the adverse criticism of the company was sufficient to warrant a congressional investigation, which was undertaken by the Committee of Ways and Means of the House of Representatives. The committee began to take testimony on February 25, 1876 and delivered its report on June 3. A number of witnesses were interrogated, the only hostile witness being Goldstone; but even he did not venture to repeat before a congressional committee the accusations he had so freely made elsewhere: "Mr. Goldstone, who testified in behalf of himself as the only prosecutor in this investigation . . . does not assail the conduct of the company. . . . He did assail the integrity of the award of the lease in 1870. . . ." ¹ The climax of the investigation was a letter to the committee from Robert Desty of San Francisco, dated May 1, 1876, in which he confessed that for six years he had written most of the spiteful pamphlets and newspaper articles, for which the material had been furnished by his employers, a group of seven or eight men, most of whom were unsuccessful bidders for the concession. In his letter Desty acknowledged that all of the charges were untrue.

Concerning the award of the concession the committee reported: "We cannot discover any fraud, or favoritism to the Alaska Commercial Company, in a decision which *required* them . . . to give as much for rental as any other persons were willing to give." ² Moore's evidence convinced the committee that the company had never exceeded its quota of skins, and the charge of mistreatment of the natives was not corroborated by a single witness: "The committee therefore conclude that the lease has been complied with according to the requirements of the law." ³

Actually it would have been almost impossible for the company to have exceeded its legal limit even if it had wanted to. The skins were counted by Treasury inspectors as they were brought to the salting sheds on St. Paul and St. George; again by the mate of the steamer in which they were shipped, and the number was entered on the bill of lading; a third time by customs inspectors when the skins were packed on the San Francisco dock; and a fourth time by employees of Lampson & Company in London. Moreover the native killing gangs, whose remuneration depended on the number of seals killed and skinned, kept very accurate records of the catch. These Aleuts often traveled to other islands or to the mainland at the end of the killing season; they undoubtedly talked about the size of the catch; and reports of any illegal slaughter would quickly have spread over the whole territory. In order to exceed the quota it would have been necessary for the company to bribe its employees and all the government inspectors on the islands and in San Francisco, the captains and mates of its steamers, members of the Lampson firm, and several hundred

Aleuts. Such wholesale corruption, if it had existed, could not conceivably have been kept secret. In fact it would not have been advantageous to the company to take more than 100,000 skins a year from the Pribilofs; any substantial excess would have overstocked the market and lowered the price.

Although the company was completely cleared by the investigation of 1876 it remained a target for hostile snipers. Governor Alfred P. Swineford of Alaska launched a violent attack against the company in his annual report for 1887. The charges were concerned less with the company's licensed operations on the Pribilofs, which the governor had not then visited, than with its alleged misdeeds in connection with the acquisition of land furs in the Aleutians and on the mainland.

Swineford's literary style was unusually colorful for an official document. The company, not content with a profit of millions of dollars from the sealing concession, "has, octopus-like, thrown out its great tentacles and gathered to itself about all there is of value in the fur trade of the whole Territory. It has, by the power of its great wealth, driven away all competition and reduced the native population . . . to a condition of helpless dependence, if not one of absolute and abject slavery."⁴

Specifically, the governor charged that the company paid the native hunters and trappers half as much for their pelts as it paid white men, and charged the natives twice as much for what they bought at the company's trading posts, the only stores in the region; that the company strangled competition by refusing to buy furs from or sell merchandise to natives who sold pelts to agents of any other firm; that it illegally marked and mutilated United States coins to identify them as its own and would accept no unmarked money, which the natives could have received only from competitors; that it boycotted and drove from the islands government officials who incurred its displeasure; that it maintained paid lobbyists in Washington to oppose legislation beneficial to Alaska; and that it selfishly retarded the settlement and development of the territory.

His peroration was a masterpiece of invective: "Conceived . . . in corruption, born in iniquity, and nurtured and grown strong and insolent on ill-gotten gains wrung from a hapless and helpless people, this giant monopoly, which rests like a blighting curse upon the progress and welfare of this great Territory, should be shorn of its corruptly secured, much-abused franchise with no more delay than may be absolutely necessary."⁵

In the summer of 1888 Swineford made an inspection tour to the Pribilofs and several of the company's trading posts. As a result he modified, in his report for 1888, some of his previous charges. He admitted that the company's agents

at every station he visited received him courteously and gave him every facility for a thorough inspection. He conceded that no marked coins had been circulated for several years, and that even when such coins had been used (as he still insisted they had been) they were probably issued by an over-zealous agent without the knowledge or consent of the company. In his comments on the Pribilofs he reversed himself completely: "It affords me pleasure to be able to report an altogether satisfactory condition of affairs. . . . I am perfectly satisfied that the company is, and has been all along, faithfully complying with all the terms and conditions of its agreement with the Government; in fact, it is doing even more in the matter of providing for the wants and comfort of the natives than its contract requires. I do not believe . . . that it has ever taken . . . more than the number of seals authorized by law. . . ." ⁶

Nevertheless the governor reiterated all the other charges set forth in his previous report and again recommended that the company's sealing monopoly, due to expire in 1890, should not be renewed.

On December 13, 1887, shortly after the appearance of Swineford's first diatribe, the company issued a reply in pamphlet form, signed by Louis Sloss as president, categorically denying all of the governor's allegations. At about the same time several congressmen demanded another investigation, in view of the imminent need to decide the question of a renewal of the company's lease.

This time the investigation was entrusted to the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, which commenced to interrogate witnesses on June 8, 1888 and submitted its report on January 29, 1889. Again the company was vindicated; the committee reported "that the Alaska Commercial Company has fully performed the covenants and stipulations of said contract" ⁷ and "has contributed liberally to the support, maintenance, comfort, and civilization of the inhabitants of not only the seal islands, but also to those of the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak, and the mainland." ⁸

A year later Senator William M. Stewart of Nevada commented on this report: "After a careful review of the whole question the committee not only exonerated the company, but commended it in the strongest terms. . . . It is certain that nothing Governor Swineford said remained unanswered, but the uncontradicted testimony of all the witnesses demonstrated beyond question that none of his charges in his first report were true. I believe it may be safely said that this is the only instance where a trading company or any other company in the United States has come in contact with natives that there has not been cause for complaint." ⁹

About 1882 the number of seals on the Pribilof Islands began to diminish,

and in order to obtain the legal quota of skins during the last seven or eight years of its concession the company was obliged to drive the *holostiaki* from beaches not previously resorted to because of their distance from the killing grounds. The company also found it necessary to abandon its policy of slaughtering only seals three or four years old and to supplement the catch with less valuable two-year-olds and even large yearlings. In 1889, the last year of the lease, about half the seals killed were two years old and a quarter were yearlings.

For some unknown reason the reduction in the size of the herds was not reported by the government inspectors on the islands; on the contrary, their annual reports to Washington stated that the herds were steadily increasing. It was not until the summer of 1889, when a new inspector, Charles J. Goff, landed on the Pribilofs, that the true situation became known. Goff submitted an alarming report, with the result that in 1890 the Treasury sent a special agent, Professor Henry W. Elliott of the Smithsonian Institution, to investigate. Elliott, who had visited the islands four times in the early 1870's, estimated the number of seals in 1890 to be less than one-third as great as in 1872, and ascribed the reduction to two chief causes: "overdriving" on land and illegal pelagic sealing (the slaughter of seals in the water). According to Elliott, overdriving (the driving of *holostiaki* for too great a distance from beach to killing ground) injured the young seals internally so that, even when rejected and allowed to return to the sea, their reproductive powers were impaired and they were useless as breeding bulls in future years.

Elliott's conclusions were flatly contradicted by David Starr Jordan and George Archibald Clark, who visited the islands in 1898 as official representatives of the government. They disagreed with Elliott's estimates of the size of the herds, both in 1872 and 1890, and denied that overdriving caused appreciable injury to the seals. In their opinion the reduction in numbers was due almost wholly to illicit pelagic sealing.

Beginning about 1880, and especially after 1885, sailing ships, each carrying a fleet of canoes, infested the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea and attacked the seals, either before they reached the beaches or while they were foraging for fish in the sea. Some of these piratical hunters were Americans, but the majority were Canadians. Both guns and spears were used for killing. The victims included hundreds of thousands of females and their unborn pups, an incalculable loss to the herds. Pelagic sealing was deplorably wasteful for another reason: most of the dead and wounded seals sank before they could be hauled into the canoes for skinning. Estimates of the number of seals actually secured and skinned varied between 10% and 30% of the total number slaughtered in the

water. In twelve years, from 1886 to 1897 inclusive, more than 500,000 skins were obtained illicitly by pelagic sealing, which probably involved the destruction of some 4,000,000 seals including unborn pups: more than twice the number killed legally on shore in twenty years by the Alaska Commercial Company. A few sealing vessels were captured and their booty confiscated by United States revenue cutters, but in the vast areas of fogbound sea the laws prohibiting pelagic sealing were almost impossible to enforce. The illegal slaughter continued on an immense scale until 1911, when a treaty between the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and Japan effectively curbed, though it did not completely stop, the ruthless destruction.

Before its lease expired on April 30, 1890 the Alaska Commercial Company submitted an offer for a renewal, but the company was outbid by another firm, the North American Commercial Company, incorporated under the laws of California with Isaac Liebes of San Francisco as president, D. O. Mills vice president, and Ernest A. Cox secretary. The new lease imposed more onerous conditions and was far less profitable than the old: the annual rental was fixed at \$60,000 and the tax per skin raised to \$9.625. Most of the other provisions were similar to those in the former lease. For the first year the catch was limited by law to 60,000 skins, and thereafter the quota was to be determined year by year by the Secretary of the Treasury. Actually the new company obtained only 21,000 skins in 1890, and its quota for the next seven years averaged about 15,000 annually.

The North American Commercial Company purchased from the Alaska Commercial Company its entire plant on the Pribilofs, consisting of dwellings, schools, barns, salting sheds, stores, and merchandise, for \$67,264.02. When the new concession expired in 1910 the herds had been reduced to such an extent that the government prohibited sealing in Alaskan territory altogether except to a very limited degree by government agents. Since that date the population of the rookeries has increased rapidly, and the seals are no longer in danger of extermination.

In February 1891 the sealing concession of Hutchinson, Kohl, Philippeus & Company on Bering, Copper, and Robben Islands expired, and the Russian government awarded a new lease, for ten years only, to the Russian Seal Skin Company, which bought the plant constructed by the original lessees.

By the time its lease terminated in 1890 the Alaska Commercial Company had branched out into many other ventures in Alaska. Between 1880 and 1890 the company built six salmon canneries, each organized as a separate corpora-

tion with its individual staff and fishing fleet. Each corporation issued 2000 shares of stock at a par value of \$50. For several years one of these companies paid an annual dividend of 100%, and in 1888 it paid 250%.

The Alaska Commercial Company also extended its chain of trading posts far into the interior and increased their number to about ninety, located at various points on the mainland coast, the Yukon River and its tributaries, the Aleutian and Komandorski Islands, at Petropavlosk in Kamchatka and Vladivostok in Siberia, and in Yukon Territory in Canada. These stores—for the most part primitive cabins—supplied the natives, and later the miners and prospectors, with staple foodstuffs, tobacco, boots and shoes, tools, and clothing. Sometimes merchandise was sold for cash, sometimes in exchange for furs. The need for communication between these isolated posts and for their periodical restocking obliged the company to expand its fleet of seagoing ships and to operate small river steamers and a flotilla of barges. In winter, when the rivers and many of the coastal harbors were frozen, dog sledges provided the only transportation.

Although its salmon-canning subsidiaries paid large dividends as independent corporations, the profits of the Alaska Commercial Company itself decreased to almost nothing after the expiration of the sealing concession. The flow of land furs continued, but its volume steadily diminished. Some of the trading posts made money; others, for various reasons, were operated at a loss. Between May 1892 and December 1908, a period of sixteen years, the company distributed no dividends at all. During the succeeding decade dividends were resumed, but on a very much smaller scale than the 50% annual average of the sealing years: ¹⁰

<i>Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Amount per \$100 share</i>
44	21 Dec. 1908	\$2.50
45	11 Sep. 1911	3
46	20 Sep. 1912	4
47	10 Oct. 1913	5
48	29 Oct. 1913	2.50
49	11 Nov. 1914	4
50	13 July 1915	2.50
51	8 Sep. 1915	1
52	13 Oct. 1915	10
53	14 Dec. 1915	1
54	4 Oct. 1916	2
55	18 Dec. 1916	1.50
56	24 Oct. 1917	2
57	13 Dec. 1917	1.50
58	9 Oct. 1918	3
TOTAL FOR 11 YEARS		\$45.50

The minutes of the company's meetings from 1919 to 1940 have been destroyed, so no record of dividends declared during those years has been preserved.

Faint indications of the presence of gold along the Yukon River were reported as early as 1866, and about 1873 systematic prospecting began near the upper portion of that river. A minor gold rush was caused in the early 1880's by the discovery of considerable quantities of the metal near Circle in Alaska and on the Lewes, Pelly, and Stewart Rivers, Canadian tributaries of the Yukon. In 1886 the finding of coarse gold near Forty Mile Creek, another tributary of the Yukon, produced an even greater flurry. Anticipating that this strike would attract a swarm of "tenderfoot" prospectors from the United States, many of whom might undergo severe hardships, Lewis Gerstle, then president of the Alaska Commercial Company, wrote to Lorenz, the company's agent at St. Michael on Norton Sound near the mouth of the Yukon, gateway to the interior. This letter was published in an article by Edward H. Hamilton in the San Francisco *Examiner* on July 4, 1927 under the heading: "Corporation Showed Its Soul North of 53," and has subsequently been reprinted several times as an example of exceptional altruism and probity on the part of a large company. The letter was in Lewis Gerstle's own handwriting:

San Francisco, May 7th 1886

Mr. M. Lorenz,
Agent St. Michael, Alaska.

Dear Sir,

We have been informed that a large number of miners have already started to the Yukon and Stewart River mines, it is probable that many others will be attracted to that section of the territory in consequence of the supposed existence of rich diggings in that district. Considering that the companies [*sic*] station at St. Michael is the nearest source of supply, an extra amount of groceries and provisions has been sent to you to meet the possible demand likely to be made upon you during the coming winter.

It must not be understood however, that the shipment referred to is made for the purpose of realizing profits beyond the regular schedule of prices heretofore established, our object is simply to avoid any possible suffering which the large increase of population insufficiently provided with articles of food might occasion. Hence you are directed to store these supplies as a reserve to meet the probable contingency herein indicated, and in that case dispose of the same to actual consumers only, and in such

quantities as will enable you to relieve the wants and necessities of each and every person that may have occasion to ask for it. In this connection we deem it particularly necessary to say to you, that traders in the employ of the company, or such others as draw their supplies from the stores of the company, doing business on their own account, must not be permitted to charge excessive profits, otherwise all business relations with such parties must cease, as the company cannot permit itself to be made an instrument of oppression towards anyone that they may come in contact with.

It is useless to add, that in a case of absolute poverty and want, the person or persons placed in that unfortunate condition should be promptly furnished the means of subsistence without pay, simply reporting such facts at your earliest convenience to the home office.

Asking your strict compliance with the foregoing instructions, which we hope will be carried out with due discretion on your part,

I am with kind regards to yourself and Mrs. Lorenz,

Yours truly,

LEWIS GERSTLE, Pres.¹¹

All of these earlier gold strikes were overshadowed by the discovery by a California miner, J. F. Butler, in August 1896, of gold on the banks of the Klondike River four miles above its confluence with the Yukon at Dawson, in Canadian territory. On August 12 a still richer pocket was found by George Cormack on Bonanza Creek, a small tributary of the Klondike. The season was too far advanced to permit a gold rush of great magnitude before the onset of the winter freeze, but in the summer of 1897 and during the two or three following summers a flood of prospectors poured into the Klondike by various routes: up the Yukon from St. Michael to Dawson, a journey of 1700 miles, or by the shorter but much more arduous trail from Skagway over the Chilkoot Pass and thence by boat down the Lewes and Pelly Rivers. Dawson, a hamlet of a dozen houses, rapidly expanded into a boom town of over 20,000 people, only to shrink again after the richest mines were exhausted to its present size (in 1950) of less than 1000.

The company, which already maintained a small trading post at Dawson, promptly constructed a larger store and several capacious warehouses. Many of the miners spent their gold as fast as they washed it out of the ground, and the company carried on a profitable business while the rush continued. Much of the merchandise was purchased in Canada to avoid import duties. The company also erected at Dawson a sawmill to supply lumber for buildings, sluice boxes,

and other purposes, as well as a power plant to pump water and furnish steam heat and electric current. The pipes were laid several feet below the surface of the ground to keep the water from freezing in winter. During the first two years of the gold rush, before Canadian banks established branches at Dawson, the company's vault was the only safe repository for the miners' bags of gold dust. The company refused to be responsible for these deposits, but the miners had such confidence in the company's integrity that no receipts were ever demanded.

The first steamer to leave San Francisco after the start of the Klondike stampede was the *Excelsior*, chartered by the company, which sailed for St. Michael on July 28, 1897. "Owing to the rush of miners contemplating to go on the *Excelsior* on her next trip," Lewis Gerstle wrote on July 19, "the office is full of all sorts of people from early morning until evening, engaging passage and soliciting information. . . ." ¹²

The company itself never voluntarily owned or operated any mines in Yukon Territory or on the Alaskan mainland, though it was occasionally forced to accept such properties from unsuccessful miners as payment for supplies; but it did own and manage two corporations that operated producing mines on one of the Aleutian Islands.

Before the Klondike rush the company ran a number of small river steamers on the Yukon, but these were totally inadequate to accommodate the Dawson-bound crowds after the great migration began. In 1897 the company ordered four large stern-wheelers similar to those in use on the Mississippi: the *Sarah* (named in honor of Mrs. Sloss), *Hannah* (for Mrs. Gerstle), *Susie* (for Mrs. Niebaum), and *Louise*. These vessels were built at Louisville, shipped in sections to Unalaska, reassembled there, and dispatched under their own power to St. Michael. These commodious steamers, each of which often carried five hundred passengers during the gold rush years, were supplemented by ten or a dozen smaller stern-wheelers: *Alice* (named for one of Lewis Gerstle's daughters), *Bella* (for Louis Sloss's daughter as well as for Lewis Gerstle's), *Saidie* (for Will Gerstle's wife), *Florence*, *Margaret*, *Leah*, *Alaska*, *Yukon*, *Arctic*, *Reliance*, and *City of Paris*. These vessels averaged twenty-two days for the voyage from St. Michael to Dawson against the current, and about ten days for the return trip downriver. The company also had sixteen cargo barges measuring 100 to 150 feet in length which were pushed ahead of the steamers. At first the only fuel was wood, cut by Indians and piled in great stacks along the banks; later the use of oil saved many hours of loading time on each trip. Eventually steamer service was extended to Fairbanks on the Tanana River and between Dawson and White Horse via the Pelly and Lewes Rivers.

The company owned and operated five ocean steamers: *Alexander*, *Dora*,

Portland, *St. Paul*, and *Bertha* (named after Lewis Gerstle's third daughter and also Mrs. Leon Sloss); seven trading schooners; and a tug, *Meteor*, stationed at St. Michael. In August 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the United States government chartered the *St. Paul* for a voyage to the Philippine Islands at the rate of \$1000 per day.

By the end of the century several other trading companies had established posts in the Yukon valley; competition was severe, and none of the firms could make a profit. At a directors' meeting of the Alaska Commercial Company held on January 21, 1901 the financial statement showed an excessive indebtedness due to very large purchases of supplies during the previous season, and to reduce the interest charges an assessment of \$25 per share was levied: the first assessment in thirty years. In order to improve their financial position two of the rival trading firms, the International Mercantile Marine Company and Alaska Goldfields, Ltd., merged with the Alaska Commercial Company in 1901. The only large firm not included in the amalgamation was the North American Trading and Transportation Company controlled by the Cudahy family of Chicago.

The Alaska Commercial Company and its new associates organized two subsidiary corporations: the Northern Commercial Company, which took over almost all the mercantile activities of the group, and the Northern Navigation Company to handle all transportation. Each was incorporated under the laws of New Jersey, each issued 27,500 shares of stock at \$100 par, and each had the same incorporators: Leon Sloss, Isaac Liebes, George H. Higbee, and William Thomas. The stock was distributed among the three merged companies in proportion to the value of the assets contributed by each, the Alaska Commercial Company receiving about two-thirds. Leon Sloss served as president of the Northern Commercial Company from 1902 until he died in 1920.

In 1902 the Alaska Commercial Company sold to the Northern Commercial Company all of its mercantile assets except sawmills and mining claims for \$1,949,500. Half of this sum was paid in Northern Commercial Company capital stock, half in 5% first mortgage gold bonds. At the same time the Alaska Commercial Company sold to the Northern Navigation Company for \$1,074,000, payable in the same manner, all of its floating property except ocean steamers, in addition to fuel, ship stores, supplies, and good will. Within the next few years the sawmills, mining claims, ocean steamers, and most of the minor items were disposed of. Thereafter the Alaska Commercial Company became little more than a holding company.

In 1911 the company sold its properties in the Kodiak district to Wilbur J.

Erskine, who had been employed by the company for many years. On April 9, 1914 the assets of the Northern Navigation Company were sold to the American Yukon Navigation Company. As a majority stockholder in the former corporation the Alaska Commercial Company received a large share of the proceeds of this sale, which it distributed to its own stockholders in the form of special dividends: ¹³

<i>Special dividend number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Amount per \$100 share</i>
1	10 June 1914	\$6
2	13 Aug. 1914	3
3	18 Dec. 1914	3
4	29 Jan. 1915	1.50
5	24 Dec. 1915	6
6	30 Dec. 1915	2.50
7	7 June 1916	11
8	8 Nov. 1916	8.25
9	18 Dec. 1916	6
10	13 Dec. 1917	6.33
		\$53.58

The Northern Commercial Company was sold on January 2, 1922 to a group of former employees headed by Volney Richmond of Seattle. On August 26, 1940 the same group purchased the last remaining assets of the Alaska Commercial Company, which by that time comprised only two properties, one at Dutch Harbor and the other at nearby Unalaska. After seventy-two years of continuous operation the Alaska Commercial Company ceased to exist.

Chapter IX

VIOLET TERRACE

*I*N 1881 Lewis Gerstle proposed to take his family to the country for the summer, away from the cold winds and damp fogs of San Francisco. He wrote to a hotel near Santa Cruz for rooms, but his application was rejected on the ground that the management did not accept Jewish guests. Such evidences of racial discrimination were rare in California at that time; this was the first rebuff of the kind that Lewis had ever been subjected to, and he determined that it would be the last. He promptly decided to acquire a country place of his own, but before buying one he thought it advisable to experiment with a rented house. He found a suitable estate on the southern fringe of San Rafael and spent the summer there with Hannah and all of his children except Sophie, who was already married and living in New York.

It was not altogether a happy summer, for Clara, Alice, Bella, and several servants were stricken by an ailment which was diagnosed as diphtheria but was probably a severe streptococcus throat infection. This was attributed to defective plumbing and in particular to the presence of a cesspool under the stable, at that time located close to the house. In spite of this drawback Lewis found the place ideal, and in August 1881 he bought it. It was to be the summer home of four generations of the Gerstle family for exactly fifty years.

The property had once formed part of a large Mexican land grant, Rancho Punta de Quentín, which probably extended as far as what is now called San Quentin Point and included the site of the present state penitentiary. This area, or a portion of it, was acquired at some unknown date by the Ross family, and a subdivision of this was subsequently purchased by John Simms. On November 19, 1864 part of the Simms property was bought for \$144.20 by John O. B. Short and Jacob Short, who also purchased additional acreage from Simms on January 14, 1865 for \$523.50. The two parcels included the lot afterwards acquired by Lewis Gerstle, but the exact boundaries of this land, defined by such vague landmarks as conspicuous trees and curiously shaped stones, can no longer be identified.

The Shorts, who were dealers in real estate, laid out the first street lines in this section of the town, known as Short's Addition, and employed surveyors to delimit the properties more precisely. On May 18, 1870 the Shorts sold to James Hunter for \$2000 a strip measuring 500 feet in a north-south direction with an east-west frontage of 200 feet along the south side of San Rafael Avenue; and on August 3, 1870 they sold a strip of the same dimensions adjoining and just west of the Hunter lot, for the same price, to Alexander Guthrie, a member of the British firm of Balfour, Guthrie & Company, Ltd., importers, exporters, steamship agents, and insurance brokers in San Francisco. On January 27, 1873 Guthrie bought Hunter's property for \$2200, thus acquiring at a total cost of \$4200 an estate measuring 400 by 500 feet or about 4.6 acres. Guthrie constructed a house and stable, which so increased the value of the property that when he sold it to Asa C. Nichols on April 4, 1877 he obtained \$18,000 for it. It was this property that Lewis Gerstle purchased from Nichols on August 11, 1881 for \$15,000.

The name of Violet Terrace had been given to the place by either Guthrie or Nichols, and Lewis saw no reason to change it; but he changed almost everything else. After that summer of 1881 a number of improvements were made: the plumbing was modernized, the offending cesspool filled in, the stable torn down and replaced by a greenhouse, a new stable erected at the bottom of the hill near San Rafael Avenue, and a separate house for the servants, containing a laundry and storerooms as well as seven or eight small bedrooms, built across the yard south of the main house. This main house, barely large enough to accommodate the family, contained on the ground floor a living room, dining room, kitchen, pantry, servants' dining room, porches on the front and one side, a small den next to the dining room, and two very small single bedrooms; on the upper floor four bedrooms, a linen room, and at first only one bath. Considering the standards of architectural taste prevailing in the 1870's the house was not without charm. It fitted snugly into the hillside, and its irregular plan and low-pitched gables blended harmoniously with the landscape, especially after most of the exterior was covered by masses of climbing roses.

When Clara and Bertha married and started to produce families the capacity of the house became altogether inadequate, and about 1890 Lewis built a second dwelling on his property. This edifice, always called the Cottage though it was as large as, and looked much larger than, the older residence, contained only bedrooms, as the occupants ate all their meals in the other house. Many years later a dining room and kitchen were added to the Cottage to make it a self-contained establishment. Unlike the quaintly gabled, modestly inconspicuous main house, the Cottage was a huge square two-storey box of deplorable design,

an architectural monstrosity which uncompromisingly resisted all attempts to mask or beautify it with vines and shrubbery.

All of these structures at Violet Terrace were built of wood, originally painted gray but much later covered with shingles. About 1898, when the family had multiplied to such an extent that the two existing residences overflowed, Clara and Dick Mack built a third house for their own use. As Lewis would permit no further encroachment upon the lawns and open spaces of the lower portion of the garden it was necessary to perch this new house on top of a hill, where it was reached by forty-two steps disposed in short flights separated by cement ramps. The Mack house, built of wood stained brown (afterwards shingled) and surmounted by a gambrel roof, had its own kitchen and dining porch.

On April 17, 1905, after Lewis Gerstle's death, Hannah purchased an L-shaped lot adjoining the original property on the west, with a maximum depth of 500 feet and 200 feet of frontage on San Rafael Avenue, extending to the corner of Clark Street. The stable was shifted onto the new lot, and during the winter of 1905-1906 the Mack house was moved from its hilltop, turned ninety degrees so that the original north front now faced east, and slowly rolled down the slope to the site formerly occupied by the stable, where it stands today. The moving of this large house was a difficult feat, as the hillside was so steep that for a time during the transit one end of the house rested on the ground while the other was raised on stilts thirty-five feet high.

From time to time various buildings of minor importance were erected: chicken coops, dovecotes, a latticed summerhouse spanning one of the graveled paths, and a large polygonal tentlike structure known as the Pavilion, with a wooden floor, pyramidal roof, and open sides screened with wire mesh as a protection against the mosquitoes that buzzed, swarmed, and bit during the summer months until, much later, systematic draining and oiling of marshy areas in the vicinity almost exterminated the pests. The Pavilion was situated in a clearing in the redwood grove south of the Cottage. This grove, one of the pleasantest sections of Violet Terrace, had once contained half a dozen huge sequoias with trunks six to eight feet in diameter, but these had been cut down long before Lewis Gerstle acquired the property, and only their shaggy stumps remained, scattered among the smaller and younger trees. South of the redwood grove was a tennis court, and beyond that an orchard extended up the hill to the property line. Another orchard occupied the northeast corner of the lot on the San Rafael Avenue side.

On March 5, 1883 Louis Sloss purchased for \$6500 from Anson P. Hotaling

the land adjoining the Gerstle property on the east, measuring 231 feet on San Rafael Avenue by 500 from north to south. On this Louis and Sarah built a large and ugly but comfortable wooden house and a stable, both painted gray. About 1900 their son Leon, who had married Bertha Greenewald, erected another house, an attractive one-storey shingled structure, on the Sloss estate. Across Grove Street, a dead-end lane that ran up the hill from San Rafael Avenue and formed the eastern boundary of the Sloss property, a piece of land measuring 147 by 428 feet, not fronting on the avenue, was bought from Hotaling on January 12, 1891 by Louisa Greenewald, Simon Greenewald's widow. Louisa built a house for herself, her son Otto, her daughter Fannie who was married to Lewis Gerstle's nephew August Heilbronner, and her younger daughter Alice. Alice married Louis Greenbaum (later Greene) in 1899, and the couple subsequently moved into a small white cottage just below the Greenewald house, fronting on Grove Street.

No fence or hedge or barrier of any kind divided the Gerstle and Sloss properties, and indeed nobody knew precisely where the line of demarcation ran. Members of the two families wandered freely from one garden to the other, the younger Slosses and Gerstles used the tennis court indiscriminately, and the children played together all over the adjoining estates. Sarah and Hannah, living next door to each other in San Rafael and on opposite sides of Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco, saw each other almost daily, summer and winter. They were devoted sisters and inseparable companions all their lives, never quarreling and not very often even disagreeing, though in some respects their temperaments were quite dissimilar. Sarah had the more forceful and dominating personality, and although the two-year difference in age lost all real significance as the sisters matured, in a curious way they maintained the rôles of elder and younger sisters even when both were in their eighties. Hannah, the meeker character, always stood slightly in awe of Sarah, consulted her about all sorts of family, domestic, and social problems, and generally followed her advice; but occasionally Hannah would assert her independence by defiantly (and somewhat apprehensively) wearing a gown or bonnet or pair of silk stockings of which Sarah disapproved.

One feature of the Sloss house in San Rafael that left a lasting impression upon the Gerstle grandchildren was the front door containing panels of colored glass that clanged loudly and ominously, no matter how carefully the door was closed, with a sound that suggested the crack of doom and sent shivers up the spines of the young trespassers.

The Gerstle family usually moved to San Rafael late in April and returned

to San Francisco in September or early October. The men commuted daily, taking the 7.40 train in the mornings and returning by the 5.10 ferry. As the sojourns in San Rafael lasted a good deal longer than the school vacations, several children also journeyed across the bay on weekdays during the late spring and early autumn. Two railroads gave access to San Rafael, each with its fleet of white ferryboats: the "broad gauge" line via Tiburon and the "narrow gauge" (afterwards electrified) via Sausalito. The narrow gauge trains stopped at two intermediate stations in San Rafael, West End and B Street, before reaching their terminus at the main station or "depot" which also served the Tiburon line. By either route the combined boat and train ride took about an hour. The family commuters habitually used the main station, though it was farthest from the Gerstle house, and were driven there and back by Fred Wright in a carryall drawn by two horses.

Notwithstanding the size of the family there was almost always room at Violet Terrace for a few guests. Lewis and Hannah liked to have their house well filled; they often referred to it as the "hotel" and it amused them to pretend that they derived an essential part of their income from their purely imaginary charges for board and lodging. "Last Sunday," Hannah wrote to Alice in August 1894, "we had a full house. . . . Every bed was occupied and Newton [Bissinger] slept on the couch. So you see the Hotel is still popular."¹ And Lewis reported about the same time: "Uncle Moses [Greenebaum] expects to leave for the East shortly, so that our Hotel will have very few patrons in the near future. I must try and avoid it if possible, otherwise the reputation of the house might suffer next season. Some of my usual guests might go so far as to report a scanty table and poor cooking, the competition among the many summer resorts on the coast is getting stronger every year, and as I am depending largely for a revenue from that source, I am very anxious to have my Hotel full from May to October."²

Actually the establishment, far from being a source of revenue, cost a good deal to maintain, but Lewis cared nothing for that as long as he felt that his family and guests were enjoying his hospitality. "Everything is going along [in San Rafael] as usual," he wrote to Hannah in January 1887. "Lots of expenses, and very few eggs, both cows in promising condition for good fresh milk in the spring."³ The cows were an extravagance, but he wanted richer milk and thicker cream than could be bought. One of his favorite jokes was to offer a guest the choice between a glass of milk and a glass of champagne, saying that one cost him as much as the other.

Catering at Violet Terrace was on a lavish scale almost unknown today. In addition to breakfast, lunch, and dinner—all very hearty meals—sandwiches

and milk were served on the porch during the morning, tea and cakes in the afternoon, and at night a buffet supper was available to anyone suffering from undernourishment at bedtime. Evenings were generally devoted to cards or dominoes. Nobody stayed up very late, as the commuters were early risers, but sometimes members of the family found it hard to keep awake even for two hours after dinner. Every evening at precisely twenty minutes past nine somebody would begin to yawn, and immediately everyone else in the room would follow suit. This routine was so invariable that it became a family joke and eventually a tradition.

For the women of the family it was a lazy life, largely devoted to reading, sewing, knitting, chatting on the porch or in the garden—and of course eating. In the early years fruit and vegetables for the table were bought every morning from a Chinese vendor who staggered up the hill bearing two huge laden baskets slung from a pole across his shoulders. After about 1900, when the oriental peddler ceased to make his rounds, the great event of the day was the morning shopping and marketing expedition to the "village," where Hannah and at least one or two of her daughters, sometimes on foot but more often in a carriage, bought provisions from the Fourth Street purveyors.

Two or three times a summer Hannah and her older daughters would reluctantly put on their best clothes and sally forth in the glossiest carriage to pay formal calls on acquaintances in San Rafael and Ross (then called Ross Valley): the Fosters, the Babcocks, and a few others. These calls were dutifully returned—invariably, it seemed, at the most inconvenient moments, on the hottest afternoons when the ladies at Violet Terrace were relaxing in unrepresentable attire. Fortunately it took a few minutes for horses to climb the steep hill from the gate, so the unprepared hostesses usually received enough warning of the impending visits either to rush upstairs and change their clothes or, preferably, to vanish into thin air. The favorite hideout on such occasions was a tall cedar tree across the driveway, known as the "tent tree" because the lowest branches had been lopped off to form a sort of arboreal cavern completely concealed by the overhanging boughs that drooped to the ground. Here the fugitives would huddle, whispering and giggling, until the sound of carriage wheels announced the departure of the "company."

The family almost never left the grounds at night except, once or twice a week, to spend an evening at the Sloss house next door. As an exceptional treat, rare because the long drive was hard on the horses, the Gerstles would indulge in a gala dinner at Pastori's, an excellent Italian restaurant near Fairfax presided over by fat Signora Pastori, a retired opera singer.

Sunday, when the men were at home, was always lively. The morning was devoted to tennis, those who did not play participating enthusiastically as spectators. This was followed by an enormous lunch with twenty-five or thirty people seated at the long table in the dining room, or alternatively by a picnic under the redwoods attended by the entire Gerstle, Sloss, and Greenwald clans and their various guests, often numbering more than fifty in all.

If in many—perhaps most—respects Violet Terrace provided an idyllic setting for informal contented family life, it had its disadvantages too. The men, shuttling back and forth across the bay five or six days a week, enjoyed a variety of interests and companionship in their San Francisco offices; but the women of the household sometimes found the long summer days monotonous. Before the automobile era the movements of the inhabitants of Violet Terrace were severely restricted. The horses could not be overworked, and few of the women were energetic walkers. Consequently, except for occasional visits to friends spending the summer at the Hotel Rafael or in rented houses in the neighborhood, and trips to San Francisco once a week or once a fortnight to shop or attend a board meeting for some charity, the women passed nearly all of their time within the boundaries of the Gerstle and Sloss properties, doing the same routine things and for months on end seeing few people except members of their own and closely related families.

For the children—and between the Gerstle and Sloss households the supply of children was always abundant—San Rafael was paradise. To the smaller tots the grounds seemed enormous: the redwood grove was a forest, the shrubbery a jungle, the sandbox a desert, and the back yard a cement prairie broiling in the sun and generally festooned with acres of clean and very clammy laundry. The farm animals provided endless entertainment. The children helped (or hindered) the gardener's assistant who fed the chickens, ducks, and pigeons, gathered the eggs, and milked the cows. For many years the pet of the family was Mascot, a dog of indeterminate pedigree imported from Alaska. In spite of his huge size Mascot was gentle as a lamb and good-naturedly allowed the children to climb all over him.

At one period or another almost every one of the children went through a gardening phase, staked out a claim to a few square feet of soil, and industriously planted carrots, radishes, and lettuces. These were usually dug up after three or four days to see how they were progressing, so the agricultural yield tended to be scanty. This mania for gardening was an unprofitable affair for Hannah Gerstle, who after supplying her grandchildren with the land, water, and seeds was expected to buy, at prices at least twice as high as those prevail-

ing in the market, any vegetables hardy enough to survive the attacks of the youngsters' spades and trowels; but she never resented the imposition and amiably paid through the nose for the puny roots and wilted leaves the children brought her.

There were also the usual outdoor games: tag, hide-and-seek, puss-in-the-corner, blindman's buff; but the most popular was one-foot-across-the-gutter, a form of prisoner's base with home-made rules adapted to the local terrain. One center of attraction was a small pond with a cement rim and bottom, circular in shape and some seven or eight feet in diameter, in the middle of which stood the white-painted cast-iron figures of a boy and girl sheltered under a cast-iron umbrella. From the tip of the umbrella a thin jet of water shot into the air, to fall in glistening drops onto the umbrella and into the pool. This ingenious garden ornament fascinated the children, who loved to turn the water on and off and who, in the course of time, tumbled into the pond one after another. Luckily the water was only a few inches deep, so none of these accidental immersions resulted in anything worse than a thorough wetting, a mild scolding, and a compulsory change of clothes. Eventually, after fifteen or twenty children had fallen into it, the pond was filled in and the dilapidated metal statues and their umbrella were carted off by the junkman.

The children's favorite entertainer was Dick Mack, who would often escort his own offspring, three or four Lilienthals of assorted ages, and any other youngsters who happened to be at hand on walks along the country roads during the hour of twilight between dinner and bedtime. One of the most popular rambles led up Clark Street to an old brewery. Another objective was an abandoned quarry, a deliciously spooky place in the dim light, and thence up the hill through the woods to what was always called the "bare tree," a tall stark trunk, blasted by lightning long before, that stood out conspicuously on the skyline. On other evenings the children would gather round Dick on the front steps of the Gerstle house, where he would tell them stories. The tales they enjoyed the most were in the form of an apparently endless series concerning two juvenile characters, Frankie and Louise, for whom Dick invented fabulous adventures that included hairbreadth escapes from Indians and tigers, undersea voyages reminiscent of Jules Verne, and rocket trips to the moon.

On Sundays Dick, who did not play tennis, would take a group of children and sometimes two or three grown-up members of the family on all-day excursions: bicycle rides to Fairfax, Kentfield, or Larkspur, from which he would often return carrying one of the tired younger children in his arms and wheeling the child's bicycle as well as his own; by train to Tiburon to fish for shiners;

or hikes to the top of Mount Tamalpais. On one of these ascents the party included Sophie Lilienthal, incongruously attired in a black dress with a trailing skirt and high whaleboned collar, a black bonnet, and black gloves. The sun was hot and the trail steep, and half way up the mountain Sophie fainted. Luckily she came to in a few minutes and, assisted by her badly frightened brother-in-law, was able to walk down to Mill Valley. On another occasion Dick and the children walked through a railway tunnel near Corte Madera and narrowly escaped death when a train overtook them.

The most festive holiday of the San Rafael summer was the Fourth of July. From dawn to dark Violet Terrace was filled with noise: firecrackers of all sizes, cap pistols, and torpedoes exploded on the gravel, with mixed emotions of delight and terror, by the smallest children. The afternoon was enlivened for the adults by tennis matches between first-rate players in the gardens of the Hotel Rafael, a rambling wooden building dripping with jigsawed gingerbread, situated about a mile and a half from the Gerstle property and set in a "landscaped" park adorned with geometrical beds of red and yellow cannas tastefully surrounded by stiff borders of begonias and ageratum.

In the evening, as soon as darkness fell, the Gerstles, Slosses, and Greenwalds assembled on the front porch of the Sloss house to watch a display of fireworks set off by the young men on the driveway and lawn below. Lewis Gerstle disapproved of the fireworks, which he considered dangerous in the hands of amateurs, but he always watched and applauded just the same. For an hour or more the spectators were entertained and thrilled by an exhibition of Roman candles, Catherine wheels, skyrockets, and other pyrotechnical attractions; and the excitement was in no way diminished by an occasional defective rocket that whizzed horizontally towards the porch or into the shrubbery instead of vertically towards the stars.

Surprisingly enough, nobody was ever hurt on these occasions, although once a colored paper balloon filled with heated gas came down on the roof of the Greenwald house and almost started a fire, an incident regarded with considerable disfavor by the inhabitants. The only real casualty of these Independence Day celebrations was Bertha Lilienthal's son Arthur, who when four or five years old ate a few fireworks under the impression that they were candies: small cone-shaped objects wrapped in tin foil which, when ignited, erupted violently into repulsive writhing snakelike forms. An ample dose of an extremely unpalatable emetic cured the child and convinced him that fireworks were inedible.

On January 16, 1911 a private corporation, the Gerstle Company, was organ-

ized to handle investments for Lewis Gerstle's widow, to set aside an appropriate fraction of her income for her own use, and to distribute the surplus income among her children. To this company Hannah deeded Violet Terrace without compensation on May 15, 1916. The change of ownership was merely technical, for Hannah continued to spend her summers there with some of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren for the rest of her life. But after she died in 1930 no member of the family wanted to live on or maintain the estate. By that time motor cars and improved roads had made summer resorts on the Peninsula much more accessible and desirable than Marin County with its complicated transportation system of ferryboats and trains, and the Golden Gate Bridge which was to shorten the traveling time between San Rafael and San Francisco, eliminate both trains and ferries, revive the popularity of Marin County, and greatly increase property values was still some years in the future. Accordingly, by unanimous consent of the heirs, the entire property was offered as a gift to the city of San Rafael on October 16, 1930 for use as a public park to be called the Gerstle Memorial Park. The offer was accepted on November 3, and on December 31 the deed was signed.

By request of the donors the most efficient of the three gardeners employed at Violet Terrace, an Italian named Cesare Bettini to whom Hannah had been particularly attached ever since he had begun to work for her, as a very young man, more than thirty years before her death, was appointed by the city of San Rafael to serve as superintendent of the park, a post he still holds. One after another the old-fashioned buildings have been demolished, and the only one that remains is the house built about 1898 and moved down the hill in 1905, which is occupied by the superintendent and his family. In 1946 Lewis and Hannah's daughter Alice and her husband Jacob Levison marked their golden wedding anniversary by donating a fully equipped children's playground to the park. Since its acquisition by the city the Gerstle Park, meticulously kept in order by Bettini, has attracted thousands of visitors.