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**THE LIFE AND TIMES
of
GILROY PHYSICIAN AND MAYOR
HEVERLAND ROGERS CHESBRO, M.D.**

The Early Years: 1859-1905

**by
Elizabeth Barratt**

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INTRODUCTION

In 1995, my husband and I purchased from a cousin the Gilroy home built for my great-grandfather, Heverland Rogers Chesbro, M.D. The grand old Eastlake Victorian had been the birthplace of all but one of the doctor's children, and for over a century had sheltered three generations of his descendants.

Armed with a small collection of family correspondence and a few scrapbooks and journals which I had inherited from Dr. Chesbro's second son, my grandfather, Elmer J. Chesbro, M.D., I have spent much of the past five years researching the life and times of this early Gilroy physician and three-term mayor. In this endeavor, I have been greatly helped by the extensive archival collection in the Gilroy Museum, located in the 1910 Carnegie Library building, just around the corner from my historic landmark home.

Heverland Chesbro, born in a sod house on the Iowa prairie two years before the outbreak of the Civil War, spent his youth on his grandparent's northern Illinois farm. Through a series of propitious events, he apprenticed himself to a local doctor, attended homeopathic medical school, and received his medical degree in 1882.

The young doctor arrived in Gilroy in December 1883 and was invited to join a partnership with long-time local physician, Dr. Berryman Bryant. After completing a five-year partnership contract, Dr. Chesbro took over the practice.

For the rest of his life, Heverland R. Chesbro practiced medicine in Gilroy. Besides his extensive and popular practice, he was elected to serve on the city council and then served three terms as Gilroy mayor. He was active on the local school board and president of the Gilroy Telephone Company. His large home on Church Street was a showpiece of the block, as it remains today.

Of Dr. Chesbro's five children, two became doctors and one a nurse. His second son, Elmer Chesbro not only took over his father's practice but also followed in his footsteps, being elected to the city council and serving two terms as mayor. Chesbro Dam, located in the western Gilroy foothills, was named for Elmer for his work in Santa Clara County water conservation.

Dr. Heverland Chesbro died in 1947. He was always respected for his wise counsel. Loyal friends and former patients frequently sought his advice. He endeavored to live a life of accomplishment, instilling in his family and community the value of a life lived with reason and purpose.

In this essay, I present the first half of Dr. Chesbro's life, covering the years from his 1859 birth up to 1905, when, at age 46, he completed his last term as Gilroy mayor. The year 1905 also marks the death of his first wife, a traumatic event which not only rendered him a widower, but left their three boys without a mother.

Arriving in California in 1883, when agriculture was rapidly dominating the economy in Santa Clara Valley, Heverland Chesbro's timing could not have been more fortuitous. This essay, which I have excerpted from a biography in progress, offers a glimpse back in time to this delightful valley, to see it as it once was, full of farmlands and orchards and small-town folk. These early residents, like the young Dr. Chesbro, looked to a brighter day for the world around them, in a valley offering fulfillment to their grand dreams, a place known as the "Valley of Heart's Delight."

Elizabeth Barratt
Gilroy, California
April, 2000

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**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF
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THE EARLY YEARS: 1859-1905**

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An Illinois Farm Boy

Heverland Rogers Chesbro, prominent Gilroy physician and three-term mayor of the South Santa Clara County farm town, began life under humble circumstances. Born in a sod house near Dysart, Iowa in 1859, he was the first child of Jared and Mary Rogers Chesbro. The son and grand-son of pioneers, Heverland, or H.R., as he was known, entered the world in an era when America was still forging the western frontier.

His mother's parents, James W. Rogers and Mary Ann Flagg Potter, had married in New York in 1839. Coming west by covered wagon and team to Illinois with one-year-old daughter Mary in 1841, they purchased 80 acres from the United States government at Harvard, McHenry County, in northern Illinois.

His father's parents, John Larkin and Orilla Fairbanks Chesbro, had been friends of the Rogers while both families still lived in Alden, Erie County, New York, prior to their mutual moves west. On entering Illinois, Chesbro family records indicate, mention was made of "passing through Chicago, a village of some 3500 people." The Chesbro family, including son Jared, continued a few miles north of the Rogers new home, settling in Big Foot Prairie near the Wisconsin border. Later, the Chesbros moved south to Cortland, Illinois, located west of Chicago.

As a child, H.R.'s mother, Mary Rogers, was sent to attend convent school in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. She later briefly later taught school there, beginning at age 17. Upon her return home, she married Jared Chesbro in Cortland, Illinois on September 12, 1858. The couple moved west to Dysart, Iowa, where they acquired acreage and built their sod home.

Heverland Rogers Chesbro was born in the house on September 10, 1859. Two years later, just after the opening hostilities of the Civil War in 1861, daughter Orilla Luana arrived. In 1865, a few months prior to the war's end, another Chesbro daughter, Emma Jane, joined the family.

By then, Jared and Mary had built a stone house and expanded their property holdings. In the fall of 1865, they were preparing for yet another change; having just leased out their Dysart farm, they planned to move north to Waterloo, Iowa. There, with the westward extension of the railroad line expected to pass through the town, Jared planned to open a general store.

A typhoid fever epidemic was rampant in the region, and the dreaded disease struck at the Chesbro home, taking Jared's life on October 21, 1865. Mary's parents traveled to Iowa to help their newly widowed daughter sell the Chesbro farm. They brought the family back to Harvard, Illinois.

According to Heverland Chesbro's daughter, Marion, "The three children grew up on Grandma and Grandpa Rogers' farm. My father remembered it as a time of hard work. Life was very hard, few memories of any happy times. One time, Aunt Orilla said, Grandpa Rogers went to town, bought a bolt of calico cloth, and brought it home, where Grandma Rogers made dresses for the two little girls, a shirt for 'Heavy' (nickname for Heverland), and maybe a dress for herself. As he was growing up, 'Heavy' told my mother he thought his future would be to marry a good, strong German girl and be a farmer."¹

In widowhood, Mary's prior education served her well, enabling her to teach to support her brood. Heverland in later years referred to his mother's holding classes sometimes in a schoolhouse, and other times in her own living room. From a very young age, Heverland and his sister Orilla attended lessons alongside the older students. "I remember learning to read before the age of 6 because I was always included in my mother's classes," he later recounted.²

¹ Letter from Marion Chesbro Walden to author, undated, 1980s.

² Notes from his granddaughter, Dorothy Chesbro Ronald

From Heverland's own brief typewritten biographical notes, which he recorded in February 1937 at the request of his second wife, Lily, we do know the family continued to live for some years in the northern Illinois area. Expectations were apparently low for Mary's eldest son, who considered himself a country lad destined to a life of labor on the nearby farms and dairies.

Of his early years and formal education in McHenry County, H.R. Chesbro later wrote, "I spent my childhood days attending school in what was then called the 'White School House,' which differed in color from the 'Red School House;' however in quality of education made no particular difference: 'cat' and 'dog' being spelled the same regardless of schoolhouse color. At the age of sixteen we moved into Harvard proper where my schooling was continued for about six months each year or two, and was of more educational value than all the other schools I attended."

The widowed Mary Chesbro married Dr. James Tiffany and the family moved over the state line to Sharon, Wisconsin. Here, H.R. sought work, however, he notes in his brief bio sketch, "the winters were so stormy and cold there was no demand... Consequently, there was nothing else to do but go to school. I have always during the latter years been thankful for those hard rugged winters since they gave me an opportunity to get what schooling I had."

This period was the most difficult of his life. He wrote, "During the years from the age of fourteen to nineteen, part of the spring, all of the summer and part of the fall I worked on the various farms in the neighborhood where we lived. Thus the social life of the adolescent period was a total blank. Working 16 and 18 hours a day, one is physically and mentally prepared to retire, only to rise at 4:00 AM and commence all over again. During this period I never received a whole dollar for a day's work. Life under such conditions was not worth the living."

At one point he gave serious thought to joining the Army. Yet, he held out hope for change of circumstances, or else, he wrote, "I would go on as I

was, to marry in due time some strong, vigorous country lassie, rent some farm on shares, and by habits of frugality, economy, and thrift, create a home, live my life in my own way, and not subject to fault-finding and criticisms of some boss. Naturally, the employer would give the hired man the hardest burden of work."

The Young Doctor

At age 20, Heverland's first real chance for change appeared. Again living back in Harvard, he went to work for Dr. James Macdonald, a local physician. Heverland lived at the Macdonald home, and with the doctor's encouragement, apprenticed himself to study medicine. He described this turn of events as the major breakthrough in his heretofore work-weary life.

"The practice in those days, in the study of medicine was, a doctor took a young man into his office. The student usually was a sort of all-round janitor, office boy, and in this medical atmosphere, he absorbed more or less practical work in the medical field." Besides working in the doctor's home, H.R. also cared for three horses and two buggies, oversaw the office supplies and assisted the doctor on his rounds. For these services, he received compensation in the form of room, board, and laundry. During his leisure time, he used and studied the doctor's books.

A small inheritance from his father Jared's estate enabled H.R. to apply to attend medical school and complete his formal training. He wrote, "I started medical school at Cleveland, Ohio on September 5, 1879. During these two years there was a period of constant study. My resource was under \$500, so one can see constant study was necessary." His daughter Marion later noted, "I have heard stories of my father's struggle to get through medical school He was often short of money. He said he had many a meal of milk toast."³ He graduated from the Homeopathic Hospital College of Cleveland on May 9, 1881.

³ Marion Chesbro Walden, letter to author, undated

Two days following graduation, he returned to the Rogers farm at Harvard. He remained for a few days before deciding to spend some time with "Doctor Mac," who practiced in nearby Walworth.

At this point, Dr. Macdonald offered Heverland his first medical job, at a salary of \$15 a month plus a room at the Macdonald home. "This appealed to me, since a lone ten dollars was all I had. The job would give me my bearings, and afford a practical experience in medical work, something like an intern as is now the routine practice in hospitals," H.R.'s memoirs note.

Following two months' work, and at the doctor's suggestion, Heverland moved to Hebron, Illinois, located east of Harvard, about 9 miles south of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

"Here I lived for 2-1/2 years with as fine citizens on an average as I have ever known. They were god-fearing, law-abiding, honest dealing, home-loving, friendly, and kind," he wrote. It was also in Hebron, he met Emma Wildey, who with her mother Lydia Blodgett Wildey, was living in Hebron with her uncle.

Heverland Rogers Chesbro and Emma Orril Wildey were married May 9, 1883. Before long, the 24-year old doctor began to ponder what the economics of such a small medical practice in remote Hebron would offer the pair.

"Hebron had no extensive future more than a fine village," he recorded. "I was ambitious to create a home and practice in a larger place. The opportunity came, and the size of the little city [I was seeking] was in California. In that day and time California was the elephant to all the people east of the Rockies. I was crazy to see the elephant. The little city was what I wanted, and so I cashed in, leaving Mrs. C. and mother with her uncle."

Heverland's grandmother Rogers' sister, Harriet Potter Freeman, owned 160 acres north of Gilroy, California. She had written to him that there were opportunities for a doctor in the little Santa Clara Valley community. She offered him the train fare to make the trip, inviting him to travel west and see for himself,



Heverland R. Chesbro, M.D.
Emma Wildey Chesbro

1884 photo



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"I did not realize my poor wife had never had a home, but had been provided for by her uncle, until she had married me. I had given her a home for six months and then hiked to California not knowing how the venture would end," he wrote. The young doctor set off, via the rails, on a westward venture, seeking that better life for himself and his bride.

Heading West

In Gilroy, at his Aunt Harriet's suggestion, he became acquainted with Dr. Bryant, who had practiced in the area for a long time and was seeking a partner to eventually take over the practice. Soon, H.R. signed a five-year contract with him and sent for Emma and her mother.

"The move was a fairly good success," he recorded. "Dr. Bryant as a partner was a rather hard task master. However, being young, with small resources, I was compelled to discipline myself for the five years until the contract was up."

In the order of things, the move to California was a major life shift for the one-time Illinois farm boy. No more would he live in fear of laboring under the "fault-finding and criticisms of some boss," nor ever suffer the fate of becoming "the hired man being given the hardest burden of work."

Heverland settled with gusto into his new career in Gilroy, a career about which he later remarked, "Practically for the first time in my life, I was free to live my life in my own way,"

The December 8, 1883 Gilroy Advocate reported his arrival,

"Dr. Chesbro, a graduate of the Homeopathic College of Physicians of Cleveland, Ohio, who has for years practiced his profession with success in Illinois, is about to establish himself and family in Gilroy, with the hope of securing patronage that will justify him remaining. The Richmond [Illinois] Gazette says, 'By attention to business and honorable dealing, Dr. Chesbro has worked up an extensive practice, and many regret his decision to leave for California. The Doctor is a nephew of Mrs. J.F. Freeman of Gilroy.'"

Gilroy in 1883 boasted a population of 2,000 inhabitants. Devoted primarily to agriculture and cattle-raising, the town had originally been

known as Pleasant Valley prior to its 1868 incorporation. The attractive, scenically situated community prided itself as a healthy place where a perfect climate created abundant summer crops and a promising economy. Town promoters boasted good roads and low real estate prices, with land offered at \$50-\$75 per acre. Besides scenic appeal, Gilroy offered opportunities in trade, education, tobacco and cheese production, dairying, stock raising, and lumbering. The citizens were portrayed as being of active social character, as evidenced in the numerous fraternal organizations, churches, reading circles and benevolent endeavor societies. The Southern Pacific Railroad made several daily stops at the depot for both north and south-bound trains, with connections to the coast.

When the young H.R. Chesbro, M.D. joined his large and popular Gilroy medical practice, Dr. Berryman Bryant was a ripe age 67. One of four physicians practicing in the community at the time, Dr. Bryant, a South Carolina native, had first arrived in California in 1849 to seek his fortune. After several enterprises, including operating a hospital in Sacramento and a hotel in Yuba County, he purchased a 2200-acre sheep ranch in Gilroy. His Gilroy medical practice was established following an 1866 stint in San Jose, where he was engaged as a banker and real estate agent.

A few months after his December arrival in Gilroy, H.R.'s bride Emma joined him, traveling with her mother across country by train. In a letter written from Illinois, dated January 26, 1884, she described preparations for the upcoming trip West. "...[Mother] is anxious to start before the snow begins to thaw. I am more afraid of the washouts than I am of the snow blockades. The goods were shipped last night. They had been at the depot over a week, but Ike had to write to Chicago to find out the rates. The three boxes, [sewing] machine, books, and goods weigh 560 lbs. The freight is thirty dollars to San Jose. They will notify you from there when they arrive. I am going to take the head of the [sewing] machine in my trunk..."

The business of doctoring in the Gilroy area during the 1880s apparently didn't bring in steady income. The residents generally enjoyed

good health, attributed to the locale's salubrious weather. A letter to the Editor at the time described the area as being "free from excessive fogs as those found nearer the coast, free from excessive winds and heat," yet also receiving "cooling effects of the ocean without the moisture." Gilroy's death rate, the letter noted, was also low.⁴ An editorial comment in the *Gilroy Advocate* declared, "The Doctors have plenty of time now to post their books and collect accounts. A great many people never think of the family doctor or of their obligations to him until they are sick."⁵ The following year, noting that a new doctor from Kansas was planning an imminent move to Gilroy, the Editor noted, "This is not an encouraging field for doctors in active practice. We have one of the healthiest valleys in the world."⁶

The trend of abundant good health in Gilroy, thus the anticipated drop in patient load, may explain an entry in the *Advocate* on January 31, 1885, just one year after his arrival, which announced "Dr. Chesbro, the most popular member of the firm of Bryant and Co., homeopathists, will hereafter practice his profession at Paraiso Springs and adjoining places during the winter and summer months." The popular resort and health spa, located in the foothills of the Santa Lucia mountains just west of Mission Soledad, usually offered among its amenities a resident doctor to consult with guests on their various ailments.

Once again back in Gilroy, an article mentioning H.R., dated January 21, 1888, refers to Doctors Chesbro, Bryant and Morey in the case of P.F. Hoey, an early settler and attorney, who met with a late-night accident on the railroad tracks. A passing train ran over his leg, and since Gilroy had no hospital, Hoey was carried to the city hall, where he was placed on a table and the mangled leg amputated. The patient was then taken to San Jose Hospital, where he later died of shock. The paper reported that a Coroner's jury had determined the patient was inebriated, as he was seen drinking heavily at a

⁴ *Gilroy Advocate*, August 1, 1885

⁵ *Gilroy Advocate*, May 22, 1886

⁶ *Gilroy Advocate*, December 3, 1887

saloon earlier that evening. An employee had found him on his knees in the dark, praying at the railroad tracks, as the unsuspecting train approached.

During the early years in Gilroy, the Chesbros lived in the one-story Pioneer home now located at 7551 Church Street. Their first child, son Arthur Wildey Chesbro, was born September 10, 1886, arriving on his father's twenty-seventh birthday.

In 1888 the Chesbro home was threatened with a serious health problem: smallpox. "The yellow [quarantine] flag has attracted notice this week in front of Dr. Chesbro's house on Church Street. The doctor was attending a patient recently at the Tobin Ranch, some two miles north of town, and...was taken sick of himself with every symptom of the disease." ⁷

Vaccination against smallpox was not universally required, despite the public notices urging the practice. Before long, two of the ranch children and two women were also afflicted. Within two weeks, Emma Chesbro was put to bed with the disease. In all, the mini-epidemic spread to three houses in town, with a total of eight cases of smallpox. The county appointed one doctor per city to administer free vaccinations. Both Dr. and Mrs. Chesbro recovered, and by the end of the month were back at their regular activities.

In the same year, Dr. Bryant finally retired and Dr. Chesbro, as agreed five years earlier, took over the practice. In a letter dated October 11, 1888, he wrote to a nephew and niece that he had looked over Dr. Bryant's account books. "In one month the smallest day's mark was \$9.00, the largest \$37.50...there were nine days that [income] was between \$20.00 to \$30.00." The monthly income, he wrote, averaged \$650.00, thus the practice's projected annual income came to \$7,800. 00.

Noting that his elder partner had been a rather firm overseer during the partnership, H.R. Chesbro wrote that his own decision to move to Gilroy had been nonetheless a "fairly good success."

⁷ Gilroy Advocate, March 3, 1888

The first seven years in Gilroy, from 1883 to 1890, were still a financial struggle for Dr. Chesbro. Besides there being very little sickness in the area for him to treat, he wrote, Dr. Bryant had also had the best choice of patients, receiving, for example, a fee of \$20.00 in cases of confinement.

An outward sign of success, attaining a beautiful, large new residence boasting all the modern conveniences of the era, was uppermost in H.R.'s mind, despite the earlier monetary difficulties. His memoirs state:

"To this end, I said we are going to build a new home and thus enjoy the added privileges in an up-to-date home...I may say here that this was the wisest policy I have ever followed..."

A Fine New Home

The Pioneer-style cottage which the Chesbros had first called home was moved north to the adjacent 40-foot lot. A handsome new residence went up in its place, located on the larger, 60-foot lot where it stands today, at 7541 Church Street.

The Gilroy Advocate reported on the new home's completion in the July 19, 1890 edition,

"One of the most complete homes in this city is receiving the finishing touches of the painter's brush. This new residence property belongs to Dr. H.R. Chesbro, the homeopathic physician and worthy successor to the practice of Dr. Bryant. The home is situated on the west side of Church street, between Fourth and Fifth streets and forms at present the chief ornament of the block...the building is unique and attractive in its exterior...it strikes the eye most favorably from the street...this addition to the homes of Gilroy is in keeping with the spirit of improvement noticeable in all buildings erected here in the past two years."

The much-anticipated, modestly decorated and roomy Eastlake Victorian was a prized achievement in the life of the former farmboy, whose life's meager aspirations but a few years before had been to rent a farm in Illinois "on shares" and devote the rest of his life to "frugality, economy and thrift."



Earliest known photo of the Chesbro home, taken in 1894.
The scene shows Dr. Chesbro standing by a tree at the curb. Young son
Arthur is near the gate. Mrs. Chesbro can be seen in the
shadows, just coming down the front porch.

Referring to his wife Emma's forbearance throughout the early, sparse period, he wrote, "Whenever I think of those lean years and remember that during that time no word of complaint ever escaped her lips, and then out of a clear sky came a new home and success, there is always a smile of joy that I could illuminate her life with what a woman prizes more than anything else in this world, a fitting home."

The structure had two bay windows, and a front porch with ornamental woodwork and a high flight of steps. The interior consisted of a parlor, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms and clothes closets, two halls and one bathroom, complete with hot and cold running water.

Builders for the house were listed as O.F. Hanson and H. Crews, plastering was done by Smith and Valencia, and the perfect graining by Kennedy of San Jose. Cleveland did the general painting and finishing. "The cost of this handsome dwelling house will be about \$2600, a marvel of cheapness," the July 19, 1890 article noted.

One of the new home's modern conveniences, the indoor bathroom, was an innovation at the time. Since Gilroy had no sewer system, homes had to rely on private septic wells located on the property. Another convenience, the central heating system, operated initially on coal, not natural gas, to provide the gravity-flow heat. The house was wired for electricity despite the fact it would be over a decade before Gilroy would receive the anticipated new power supply. The earliest known photo of the residence, taken in 1894, shows an oil lamp in the front parlor window, kerosene being the home's lighting source during those first years.

A Thriving Community

Dr. Chesbro's improved lifestyle during the decade from 1890 to 1900 was reflected by growth in Gilroy itself. Civic improvements, an increasing population, and an expanding, agriculture-based economy were bringing prosperity and progress to town. To the south lay the well-known Bloomfield

Ranch, property of Henry Miller, known as the "Cattle King" of California. Nearby, at Sargents, the productive C.C. Morse Seed Company was overseen by the industrious Chinese foreman, Ah Hem.

Besides cattle raising, the town's economy depended largely upon production from vineyards, fruit and walnut orchards, dairy products, a tobacco factory, and by the end of the decade, sugar beets. The beets were grown by farmers in nearby San Felipe, under contract with Klaus Spreckels, the "Sugar King." The bountiful beet harvest was shipped to the massive new Spreckels Sugar Refinery located just outside Salinas, built in 1898.

Just as the Santa Clara Valley between San Jose and Gilroy was becoming known as one great orchard, the prune during this period increasingly dominated the orchardist's attention. In 1894, a large fruit dryer was opened north of Gilroy at Rucker. The occasion was seen by the directors and stockholders of the Santa Clara County Fruit Growers Union as a propitious event. By 1896, Santa Clara County, with a population of 70, 290, held half of all the prune trees in America, plus the largest seed farms in the world.

Gilroy, straining at the bit to catch up with the progress seen in larger surrounding cities, still had basic public improvements to address. One of them was water: the city needed a more reliable supply than the reservoir and small dam on the Uvas River. The population also suffered from lack of adequate flood control, with frequent inundations during winter storms at times turning the entire area below Sixth Street into an unbroken sheet of water.

By the end of 1890 Gilroy streets boasted 8 blocks of asphaltum, and concrete sidewalks. By 1891 a telephone line had been run in from San Jose, with the main office located at Hilby's Drug Store. In 1893, a numbering system enabled the houses in town to receive home mail delivery. And, finally, in 1897, a few downtown stores and street lights were to receive electric power. The paper reported that "the nucleus for an electric light plant

was established at the rear of Ellis' Hardware store by local Edsonian, Edgar Holloway, a 52-volt dynamo capacity of 200 candle power."⁸

The town social life now included coveted invitations to Henry Miller's summer home atop Mt. Madonna, a two-hour uphill buggy ride into the Coast Range west of town. At the foot of the mountain range, two popular resorts, Saunder's Redwood Retreat and Blodgett's Hotel, drew visitors from as far as San Francisco. In the eastern foothills, guests enjoyed weeks of resort spa relaxation at Gilroy Hot Springs.

In the Chesbro house, life soon took on the higher caliber of social formalities expected of an up-and-coming citizen. Dr. Chesbro held offices in both the local Masonic Lodge and the International Order of Odd Fellows, and joined a Tuesday evening gentlemen's whist circle. Mrs. Chesbro belonged to both the local Eastern Star and the Rebekahs, and was a member of the Gilroy Ladies Reading Society. The family attended the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Houseguests at the new Church Street home were frequent: Dr. and Mrs. Macdonald, whose stable and offices H.R. had once cleaned in exchange for his medical apprenticeship, made several trips to Gilroy from their home in Wisconsin. H.R.'s mother, Mary Chesbro Tiffany, visited her son and family regularly, traveling by train from Iowa to spend long winter months in the mild Gilroy climate.

Social events at the homes of prominent or upward-aspiring local families were reported in the newspaper. The Chesbro's parties were no exception, with the guest lists including most of the familiar names in town: Clark, Mayock, Whitehurst, Ingham, Eschenburg, Rea, Hecker, Hersey, Hoxett, Wilson, Sorenson, Benn, Tryon, Reeve, Loupe, Hollaway, Benn, Plunkett, Moore, Robinson, Zuck, Strange, Thomas, Cobb, Sheldon, Morey, Lennon, Willey and Blake.

⁸ Gilroy Advocate, June 19, 1897

A typical evening's home entertainment of the period would last from 8 to 12 PM, and featured card parties, sometimes accompanied by a music recital or social games. A midnight buffet would follow, with dainty sandwiches, cakes, and pastries. In abstemious Methodist tradition, the Chesbros served only coffee as the evening's beverage.

One such gathering was described in the society section of the Advocate, "Two charming parties were given on Wednesday and Thursday evenings of last week by Dr. and Mrs. H.R. Chesbro. The spacious parlors were filled and both evenings were passed off most pleasantly in playing the latest society game, "Tiddley Winks." ⁹

Civic Pursuits

Along with the increased medical load and expanded social duties, H.R. during this period also began to make his first foray into local politics. In 1890, he was elected to a term on the City Council. Later that year he served as a delegate to the State Republican Convention in Sacramento, helping to prepare the slate of Republicans for the election precincts in the south end of Santa Clara County. Along with George Hersey and Victor Bassignano, he served on a committee to organize a Republican Club for Gilroy.

In 1891, a Gilroy Gaslight Company was formed, with stockholders bringing local control to the town's small gaslighting system. H.R. Chesbro served on the board of directors along with O.M. Welburn, L.A. Whitehurst, S. T. Moore, and A. Robinson.¹⁰

The Chesbro family was growing, as well, welcoming son Elmer Jared, who was born in the new Church Street home on February 11, 1894. The same year, H.R. tried his luck at a run for the mayoral seat, but lost to M. Casey by 47 votes.

⁹ Gilroy Advocate, March 14, 1891

¹⁰ Gilroy Advocate, December 15, 1891

In 1895 Dr. and Mrs. Chesbro expanded their real estate holdings with the investment purchase of the 1881 Rohr Queen Anne cottage at 164 Fourth Street, and the 1890 Pioneer house located next door at 194 Fourth Street.

H.R. ran in 1896 as the only candidate for the office of School Trustee. The newspaper endorsed him, noting, "...As a freeholder interested in the progress of the town and a man of good address and education, we see no reason why he should not prove an acceptable trustee to our citizens."¹¹

In 1897, the Chesbros purchased additional property, two lots of the Lewis estate, located on the southeast corner of Railroad and Martin Streets, for \$700. The transaction and plans were duly reported, "He will shortly commence the erection of two handsome modern cottages for rental. The Doctor has no trouble in finding tenants for his cottages, as he wisely builds desirable homes that are the ornament of the town."¹²

In a letter written on August 4, 1897 to her sister-in-law, Emma Jane Chesbro Wort in Kearney, Nebraska, Mrs. Chesbro offers a lively description of family life in her Gilroy home:

"...We have two fine boys, but Heavy will never be satisfied until we have a girl, and what I am afraid of is that there is none in the market, and I don't want another boy. I am happy and quite satisfied as it is...Arthur is up in the hills camping a few days with friends. I wish you and family might have visited us this summer. We have had delightful weather, only a few hot days and every night cool, so cool that if I wear a white dress after five o'clock I am most sure to take cold...The boys would be delighted with hail stones, they scrape up the little ones we have sometimes and eat them, but such large ones are too much of a good thing...I said to Elmer I wouldn't get the chairs in the middle of the floor for cars until after dinner this evening. His answer was, 'Mama, if you was little like me, and had my head on, you would have played cars alright.' "

Although a Republican in a Democratic-dominated city government, in 1898 the urge to run for mayor struck again. The announcement met with the approval of the local newspaper:

¹¹ Gilroy Advocate, May 23, 1896

"Dr. Chesbro should be the next mayor of Gilroy. He has for years been in touch with the best interests of the taxpayers. He is sufficiently well off to have opinions of his own and to express them for the public good. The Dr. is young, patriotic, progressive, and in every way loyal to the city of Gilroy. Here he has spent money freely and set an example to others in building up the town and sharing risk of loss or gain in sundry enterprises. Dr. Chesbro has at least as much at stake as the ordinary citizen and is therefore as much concerned in good government and low taxes. He is not without experience in public affairs and his record is a clean one. Few men in this community... have been more fortunate. We believe the doctor holds the trump card in this election." ¹³

Following his victory, H.R. was sworn in on May 10, 1898 by Justice Howard Willey. For the first time in city history, the Republicans were in control. "With Dr. Chesbro as mayor, the community may feel assured that affairs will run along in the proper manners, and we feel safe for predicting that the voters will be proud that they have placed him at the helm of the city's government. The doctor is a progressionist and will do all in his power to put Gilroy in line with other lively towns in the state." ¹⁴

At his first Common Council meeting, the new mayor outlined his priorities: replace paid commissions with regular salaries for the City Clerk, the Water Superintendent, and the Fire Department officers; move the city cemetery away from the north of town, and revise certain city ordinances.

That summer, he supported the formation of the city's Red Cross Chapter, with Mrs. Chesbro serving as First Vice President. Eighty-one new members signed up at the first mass meeting. On July Fourth, Mayor Chesbro gave the main remarks at the city ceremonies. In typical fashion, the day was celebrated with an elaborate parade down Monterey Street, a downtown community basket picnic and barbecue, an afternoon horse race, and a grand evening ball at the Music Hall.

¹² Gilroy Advocate, March 27, 1897

¹³ Gilroy Advocate, April 23, 1898

¹⁴ Gilroy Advocate, May 7, 1898

On January 21, 1899, the Chesbros' third child arrived, not the little daughter H.R. had yearned for, but another healthy boy, Donald Heverland. Born in the final year of the 19th century, little Donald's arrival added to the domestic bliss of the gracious Church Street home.

Another real estate purchase occurred in April, 1899 when the Chesbros bought the H.L. McDuffee building, site of the Gilroy Advocate offices on Monterey Street. The older wood-frame structure was moved in preparation for a new brick doctor's office to be constructed in its place.

Once again, despite an opposing candidate, H. R. put in a bid to keep his seat in the upcoming School Board elections. The local paper lavished its recommendation for his retention:

"The Doctor has permanent interests here. He has done good service for the town with the two Democratic members of the Board. Our handsome high school building has been erected during his administration and his zealous work has doubtless met with public approval. The opposition to him may or may not be personal or partisan, but there appears to be no tangible reason for setting him aside. People in their thoughtless cry for change often overlook the advantage of having experienced men in office. Mr. John Bannister is an excellent man and would do official duty conscientiously, but Dr. Chesbro is in every way his equal and in view of his experience will, we believe, in this election be preferred by the voters."¹⁵

Work progressed on the new, two-story office on Monterey Street. The building was ready for occupancy by early November, 1899. The main basement room was occupied by John L. Fisher, a tailor. The doctor's offices were on the main floor, and the upper story was taken by Inez Fitzgerald, the photographer.

City elections were again approaching, along with the New Year. When he threw his hat into the ring for a second term as mayor, H.R. once again received resounding approval from the local press, which enumerated his qualifications,

¹⁵ Gilroy Advocate, May 27, 1899

"The record of Mayor Chesbro as head of the administration now closing its term has been at least as creditable as that of any of his predecessors. The work he outlined when taking office has been accomplished with the help of his intelligent and painstaking colleagues, who like himself, have only had the public wealth at heart and gratuitous services given to this community. These public-spirited effort of theirs have been the line of progress for local advantage. They may have made a few trifling mistakes, the best generals in war and finance do that, but their work, as a unit, will stand well in the history of the town."¹⁶

At the close of the 19th century, the outside world was caught in global upheaval and change. Following cessation of the Spanish-American War, Spain surrendered the last vestige of her once mighty sovereignty in the Western Hemisphere. A war existed between England and the Transvaal Republic. United States troops were engaged in battle with Filipino insurgents. In France, the Dreyfus trial commanded daily headlines. There was talk of laying a telegraphic cable across the Pacific, from the United States, via Hawaii to Manila.

Gilroy's economic expansion, along with that of the Santa Clara Valley, indicated new directions for local industries. The Gilroy Advocate noted, on July 8, 1899, "Indications are that in a few years Gilroy will have passed from its exclusively pastoral and agricultural stage to an era of production and will see more progress and development than it has seen in 25 years. Evolutionary forces are at work in the valley-seen in the cutting up of big ranches. Now, oil may flow at Sargents which will, if successful, brings riches and industry to the area."

Inside the comfortable Chesbro home, still the block's most gracious adornment, life for the growing family seemed healthy and secure. A glowing description of the house and its occupants, published several years earlier in the San Jose Daily Mercury, had called the home "typical of many of the better class of residences in Gilroy...a model of architectural taste and neatness...surrounded by well kept flowerbeds and lawns." The article

¹⁶ Gilroy Advocate, April 7, 1900



This August, 1900 family scene shows, top to bottom:
Arthur Chesbro (age 14), cousin Weslie Wort (age 8), Elmer Chesbro (age 6),
and baby Donald Chesbro (8 months).

described its owner as "...one of the best known and most prosperous medical practitioners in town...identified with all undertakings for the public welfare..." ¹⁷

On the cusp of the Twentieth Century, life couldn't have been more busy or contented for the Chesbros. The family circle had been completed with baby Donald's arrival a year before. The two older boys, Arthur and Elmer, were growing up in a healthy, well-run household. The doctor and his wife opened their home regularly to Gilroy society for genteel luncheons, teas, and the inevitable card parties.

Into the New Century

In 1900 Mayor H.R. Chesbro was reelected to a second term. In his first address to the City Council in the new term, he pointed out Gilroy's most pressing needs: the city reservoir needed cleaning out twice a year instead of annually, and that a water seepage problem at the dam indicated a need for more water pressure. He stated the project could be paid for by proceeds from the prior year's cemetery sale, which should take precedence over plans for a new city hall. He indicated the unused city pound lot should be sold and the funds be put aside, along with issuance of bonds for such a new structure. Also, he suggested, gravel should be used to repair city streets.

Oil discovery south of Gilroy at Sargents had made local news, with the Watsonville Oil Co. beginning its first crude oil shipments from Chittenden to local markets for use in road oiling. In 1901, fueled by the momentum of this new discovery, H.R. became one of five officers, along with M. Casey, H. Hecker, S.T. Moore and E.D. Crawford, in the organization of the Gilroy Oil Company. The 20-year lease was located on the William Trombley Ranch, seven miles west of Gilroy, a spot which the local paper reported held "fine indications of oil." ¹⁸

¹⁷ San Jose Daily Mercury, Sunday Morning, August 14, 1892

¹⁸ Gilroy Advocate, January 19, 1901

In March, 1901, articles of incorporation of the Gilroy Gaslight and Fuel Company were filed with the County Clerk, to conduct a gas plant for fifty years. Directors were listed as: A. Robinson, S.T. Moore, L.A. Whitehurst, J. Casey, and H.R. Chesbro. Capital stock in the corporation was \$17,500, divided into 1750 shares.

The area surrounding Gilroy bustled with social and business activities. In 1902, Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson held a housewarming at her new summer home at Redwood Retreat, a place the Scottish writer's widow dubbed "Vannumanutangi," a Samoan name for "vale of the singing birds." The Gilroy elite and her friends from the San Francisco art and literary circles were frequent guests at Mrs. Stevenson's social events.

As with the rest of the Santa Clara Valley, an agricultural revolution was taking place in turn-of-the-century Gilroy. Cream shipments from area dairies increased, reducing the once profitable cheese industry to one-fifth its former output. Portions of former pasture lands, so long the area's mainstay, were being quickly turned over to beet culture for the Spreckels Sugar Refinery. The land was also producing another profitable local industry, seeds.

This last provided a visual delight for travelers headed south of town toward Sargents, where the Morse Seed Farm controlled 1250 acres of rich valley land. In the snug fertile swales, 80 to 150 workers were employed to cultivate seed flower varieties of sweet peas, asters, poppies and verbenas, along with acres of seed vegetables in onions, lettuce, tomatoes, parsnips, oyster plant and spinach. Serving at Morse's with long-time Supervisor Ahlem was his cousin, Ah Henry, a specialist in sweet peas.

To the north, the 30,000 population San Jose was titled the "Prune Metropolis of the World," for the ten thousand trays of royal purple fruit spread out in one unbroken tract in the Santa Clara area during the drying season.



Heverland Rogers Chesbro, M.D.
Photo taken in 1902 during his second term as Mayor of Gilroy

Flourishing apple and walnut orchards surrounded Gilroy, along with new vineyards planted on slopes west of town. To handle the area's growing fruit industry, a fruit packing house was built south of Ninth St.

Downtown Gilroy improvements included the installation of uniform cement sidewalks, gutters and street pavement along Monterey Street. Taller telephone poles were brought in to handle the growing local phone service, and mail delivery was extended west as far as the Uvas and Redwood district.

During these first, vibrant years of the new century, pleasant events continued apace in the Chesbro home with a typical celebration reported in the April 6, 1901 Gilroy Advocate, which noted Mrs. Chesbro threw an at-home Easter Tea, held for the ladies of the Methodist Episcopal Church Sewing Circle. The article noted, "The Chesbro home is well-adapted to such affairs. The hallway was decorated with lilacs and the parlors with Ladia Banksia and Gold of Ophir roses, clusters and sprays being arranged most artistically. The tea consisted of egg sandwiches, cakes, cheese, pickles, coffee and tea." Later that spring, the Chesbro's old friends, Dr. and Mrs. Macdonald, paid another visit enroute back to the Midwest.

Dr. Chesbro was a busy man. In addition to his civic duties and business pursuits, he still ran a full-time medical practice. Brevities in the local newspaper customarily listed doctors' newsworthy emergency cases, to include Dr. Chesbro's pumping the stomach of a man who had tried to poison himself by swallowing liniment, and his stitching up a new ranch worker's nasty wound. The injury occurred when the hapless man, when sitting on a harrow, was thrown by a startled horse. A tooth of the harrow had ripped open his groin.

In 1902, elected for a third time, Mayor Chesbro reviewed his previous record at the first Council meeting of the new term. His list of accomplishments included street grading and extension, an improved water system, and city property sold to build a dam. He noted there was a balance of over \$4,000 in the city treasury. New proposals included widening the bridge on Church Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets, spending \$1,000 to

install a cement floor in the reservoir to stop the growth of moss and vegetation, improving the city lighting, and repair of public buildings. As there was no space to store public records or pursue the more sophisticated matters of a growing city, the Mayor stated, it was time the city built a suitable city hall, one which would also accommodate a branch of the county jail.

Always a civic promoter, the Mayor was appointed to the Executive Committee of the Republican Club. He often greeted various Boards of Trade delegations who visited town, including a group of sixty San Francisco businessmen and the Knights of Pythias, whom he conducted on a local promotional tour.

Gilroy, along with other south Santa Clara County cities, came under pressure from the Bay Cities Water Company, which was attempting to tap into the local Coyote, Uvas and Llagas water systems for diversion to the greater Bay Area. Local orchardists initiated a lawsuit to prohibit this action and Mayor Chesbro sent a strong message to the company that Gilroy water would not be delivered north.

By 1904, Gilroy was abuzz with the imminent arrival of full-service electricity. "We may anticipate electric power in this city and valley within a few months. It will not only supply power for irrigation, a recognized want in much of our land, but will also be used to drive much of our machinery, as well as for street lighting and perhaps for motor cars," ¹⁹ the paper noted, enthusiastically.

The 1904 mayoral race was approaching, and the doctor was forced to weigh whether or not he desired to run for a fourth term. In March, the Gilroy Advocate reported it had learned on good authority that, after 6 years' service, the mayor would doubtless retire and allow the honors to pass to another equally worthy citizen.

Emma Chesbro was also not pleased at the prospect of her husband's continuing in office. "I haven't the heart to wish dear old pop defeated, but I

¹⁹ Gilroy Advocate, January 2, 1904

don't want him to have the office another term," she wrote, in a letter to her boys, while she was away visiting.

But at that point, George Dunlap declared his candidacy for mayor. In a newspaper interview, without naming Mayor Chesbro per se, Dunlap denounced the Chesbro administration's record and nearly all its achievements over the previous three terms.

Following the heated outburst, very late in the run, H.R. decided to resubmit his candidacy to the Gilroy voters. The move came too late: Dunlap won by 108 votes.

In June, 1904 at the close of his third and final term, Mayor Chesbro summarized his accomplishments, citing city monies spent on redeemed bonds, a new dam, increased city and water revenues, the extension of Seventh Street, the removal of the unsightly old cemetery, improved gas company management, and having hired a city attorney for a period of one year to revise codes and ordinances. He concluded by encouraging the citizens to support their new mayor.

A Chapter Closes

Inside the Chesbro home, a curtain was beginning to draw over the bright, happy scene. Around 1900, Mrs. Chesbro had discovered a lump in her breast, and over the next few years the growing malignancy began to weaken her health, bringing worry, and then despair to the family. As a physician, H.R. knew full well the implications of the disease, occurring in a day and age when the only postoperative remedies for such ailments were hope and prayer. Friends made every effort to attend to the ailing wife and mother. Mary Chesbro Tiffany arrived from Iowa to help care for the family.

During her stronger episodes, Emma spent several visits with San Jose friends. On one such trip, in early 1904, she wrote an encouraging letter home to her children, "I hardly wake up all night and if papa could see all I eat, he would expect to see me come home fat. Really, I eat so much in one day as I do in two at home. I just saw a little boy younger than you, Elmer, but with

hair and a round little body like yours, and I wanted to hug him for your dear sake. Yes, Artie, you have a dear good papa to love you all, what a comfort to know that we all love each other."

Rallying for awhile, Emma wrote from Gilroy on August 4, 1904 to her sister-in-law, Orilla Chesbro Hancock, in Center Point, Iowa:

"Heavy took me to spend the afternoon with a friend and I came home feeling fine... I have been riding twice and expect to go to the farm in a day or two. I go out in the yard and basement... {Heavy} seems afraid to hope, but you will pray for me, won't you, dear, that I may cling close to God. Mother [Tiffany] and the boys have been spending a week at Capitola. Grandma was quite ready to come home, but the little boys would like to live there, if Mama would go, too. Don had never stopped talking since he was born, until he saw the ocean. That was too much for him. He was too full for utterance, he jumped up and down, but said not a word. But he soon got used to the waves and loved to play in them."

Despite her earnest prayers and the hope of her loved ones, 43-year-old Emma Wildey Chesbro passed away in the Chesbro home on March 22, 1905, surrounded by her grief-stricken husband and children. The funeral was conducted at the Chesbro residence by Reverend Towner of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The cortege which followed her casket to the cemetery was reported to be the largest ever seen in the city, leading to a gravesite laden with numerous beautiful floral tributes.

H.R. later described that dim, sad time in his memoirs, "The curtain is now run down, after an illness lasting over a period of five or six years, [when] she who had shared with me the vicissitudes of life passed to the Great Beyond, leaving with me a memory as kind and gentle as a morning in June."

Mary Chesbro Tiffany remained in Gilroy to care for her three grandchildren. Her son Heverland, whom she had borne forty-six years before in a sod house on the remote Iowa prairie, now faced the loneliest episode of his life. Having just completed three mayoral terms in his adopted hometown, he now focused attention on his three sons. Dr. Chesbro's active

medical practice kept him involved in community life, along with an increased devotion to civic endeavors. It was these efforts which would find him at the forefront of Gilroy's progress for years to come.

X X X



The mother of Heverland Rogers Chesbro, M.D.,
Mary Rogers Chesbro Tiffany, poses with two of her grandsons, Elmer
Chesbro (upper right) and Donald Chesbro (lower left).
Photo taken in 1906.

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