



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California  
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# Jastro House, 1877-2010

By Gilbert P. Gia

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**I**n 2006 I interviewed Glenn Burroughs , who then owned the house. He told me he had placed the two-story house on the market for \$240,000. Burroughs pointed out that it was on the cultural register, and he had started remodeling the old relic, but his retirement funds were going down fast. At the time we talked, Jastro House had been condemned, but that fact did not discourage passers-by. Burroughs said they usually said they would love to buy it and restore it. What follows are some details of our conversation, in more or less unrelated order.<sup>1</sup>

**It was probably in the mid-1870s that Henry A. Jastro bought five lots on**

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<sup>1</sup> According to Jack Hardisty, in December 2009 Bakersfield attorney William Alexander Jr. bought Jastro House (*Bakersfield Californian*, September 24, 2010).

**the block where the house now sits between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. It gave him one-fourth ownership. He built his family house on one of those lots in 1877. According to Burroughs , Jastro built it only a foot or so above grade, which at the time was revolutionary for Bakersfield where houses were constructed as much as three or four feet above grade. Burroughs said Jastro did that to demonstrate his faith that the area was no longer at risk of flooding.<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> **Jastro was overly optimistic. In 1893 a flood filled the street in front of the Southern Hotel at 19<sup>th</sup> and Chester two feet deep. "...At about nine o'clock on Thursday evening, people at the Arlington Hotel heard the noise of rushing water in the river and walked out on Chester avenue. ... They saw a vast sea of water spread out before them. It reached the railroad embankment (*present grounds of museum*). It made Bakersfield a Venice and changed the Panama country to sea. Everything between the railroad track and Chester avenue to the west was a torrent of water. The outlet for this vast rush of water was low ground west of the new schoolhouse (*today's fire station next to the Fox.*) Daily Californian, Feb 11, 1893**



**The house is built of full-dimensional redwood, and although that size was not unusual for the time, the material was. Most framed homes were built of fir brought down from nearby sawmills. Because redwood mills were more distant, the stick lumber used in Jastro House was probably among the earliest of rail deliveries after the Southern Pacific arrived here in 1876. Burroughs knew the stairs, banister, and newel posts were made in San Francisco.**

**According to Glenn Burroughs , around the turn of the century a church was built next to the house on the northeast corner of 20th and G and a parsonage built behind the church, to the south. The congregation acquired the Jastro House sometime in the 1920s and divided the rooms to make a Sunday school. Burroughs' mother taught in one of those rooms.**

**The house was not always at 1811-20th Street. The lot where it now stands once extended south to 19<sup>th</sup> Street because in 1877 there was no alley between 19th and 20<sup>th</sup>. In 1877 the house faced south. On July 17, 1917 the *Californian* described how it was moved by mule-power and rollers to face north onto 20<sup>th</sup> street. After that, Jastro had enough space to construct a commercial office building, later called the Standard Oil Building. Burroughs added that in some later years Jastro lived in an apartment building behind it.<sup>3</sup>**

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**In the 1930s Burroughs ' grandmother Jennie Burroughs bought the house, remodeled it to be an apartment house, and for the rest of the Depression rented rooms.<sup>4</sup> Glenn and his sister came to live there in the**

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**3 Jastro's construction, later called the Standard Oil Building, was built in two stages in 1917 and 1921. In 1920 the Kern County Land Co. moved its Central Valley offices from Fresno to Bakersfield and moved into Jastro's building at the corner of 19th and G Sts. In 1921 plans were drawn up and construction started on a \$125,000 addition of 10,000 ft.**

**4 Jennie's maiden name was Jane Amelia McGrann. The city directory of 1934 shows**

later 1930s. He recalled that city ordinances then were more subjective than today: a sleeping area could be a kitchen, but food could not be prepared in a bedroom.

From the front entrance of the house a long, straight corridor leads to the dining room. On the west wall is another door, this one with a transom. The door opens into a narrow room that was once an outside porch. When the church acquired the building, they converted the porch to a Sunday school nursery. Another door (bi-fold, doubled-hinged, half resting against a wall) opens into a dining room. It is the most southerly room of the house. This room once would have faced north, on the cooler side of the building.

There is no formal entry; upon entering visitors face a steep stairway to the left of the hall to the kitchen. Above are two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a sleeping porch, added in 1896. Such additions were common before electrical cooling systems came into wide use. The east bedroom once had a full bath, but Borough's grandmother moved the tub to the first floor. She did not sleep upstairs. A sink and toilet, however, remain in the upstairs bathroom.

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an Andrew Cheronos offered furnished rooms there. Directories of 1935, 1936, and 1937 show that Mrs. J. A. Burroughs had furnished rooms. Jennie might have not rented rooms after 1937. The city directory of 1938 directory simply lists Mrs. J. A. Burroughs.

**Downstairs, the rooms have 16-ft ceilings, 14-ft on the second floor.**

**Lath and plaster walls are 3/4-in thick and when applied in 1877 the wet plaster was impregnated with horsehair. The earthquakes of 1952 caused no damage to the house, and none of the walls show evidence of cracking.**

**There is no fireplace or hearth, nor evidence one ever existed. Heating was probably via a coal-fired stove in the living room. A metal cover high on the west wall of the living room marks where a flue entered the brick chimney. A similar cover in the bedroom just above the living room shows similar access for a flu. Before 1917 the window of that bedroom faced the morning sun. The second bedroom shows no evidence of a flue and might have been unheated.**

**Burroughs : "When my sister and I moved here in 1937 I slept upstairs in the little room off the main bedroom on the northwest side. Actually that little room had been a walk-in closet. It now holds the air-conditioning unit. My sister slept in the large room adjoining the little closet. This was my home starting in 1937. The house now has copper plumbing throughout and a prewar, grounded electrical system. It has a five-ton air conditioner, and a two-ton unit is outside. It also has heated, forced**

**air. The cabinets in the kitchen are original to the house, but the sinks are not.”**

**Burroughs worked for the Bakersfield City School District for 13 years and was a speech therapist for several more. He felt he could not advance in the school district so he quit and left town. During this time he rented the house. “I was working in Los Angeles when I decided to hire some work done to the old house. Later on I found out that two people were living here without my knowledge. They'd also taken the gingerbread-work off the front of the house and sold it to a company in Los Angeles. But that wasn't the worst. One of them heard voices coming out of the wall of an upstairs closet. She broke a huge hole in the wall to find out who was inside the wall. She crawled through, and the floor gave away. She fell straight down to the bottom floor. After that the city shut off the water and the gas and electricity and posted the house. I can't lived here. I'm living on Eye street with a friend.” Glenn Burroughs died not many months after that.**

**Jastro probably lived here for 20 years. Mrs. H.A. Jastro (May Emiline) died in this house on the afternoon of May 24, 1894. Their 19 year-old son Harry was then at school in Germany, and their daughters Mary Emiline, 15, and Carolyn Louise, 14, probably had not yet returned home**

from nearby H Street School. A year after Mrs. Jastro's death, both daughters boarded at Mrs. Caswell's Marlborough School in Los Angeles. Sometime between then and 1913 Jastro built a second home near the corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and B streets (2229-19th Street). The *Californian's* story of 1917 suggests that Jastro either sold or rented the old house around the turn of the century. Henry A. Jastro died in 1925. His biography is at [www.gilbertgia.com](http://www.gilbertgia.com) under the section People.

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