

Putnam Livermore — worked to save state's public lands

By John Wildermuth

As a member of a pioneer family of prospectors, Putnam Livermore wouldn't have been tagged as someone who would devote his life to preserving the state he was born in.

But as co-founder of the Trust for Public Lands, first attorney for the Nature Conservancy in the western United States and a leader in conservation law, Mr. Livermore, who died Nov. 1 at the age of 93, helped keep the forces of growth and development at bay as he worked to save huge chunks of the state for future generations.

Born in San Francisco on May 29, 1922, Mr. Livermore used his lifetime of family connections and experience to

convince wealthy Californians that the state needed their land more than they needed the money it could bring.

Mr. Livermore's "kindness, patience and thoughtful consideration of others made him a favorite with eccentric donors of large pieces of property and he became a highly effective advocate for preserving open space," his family said in a notice of his death.

Mr. Livermore attended the Thatcher School in Ojai (Ventura County), UC Berkeley, Yale Law School and Boalt Hall at UC Berkeley. A tall, rangy, athletic man, he rowed for a UC Berkeley championship crew team as an undergraduate. A photo of the boat crossing the finish line seven lengths ahead



Chronicle file photo 1974

Putnam Livermore was an advocate for preserving open space.

of the field was featured on his wall for the rest of his life.

While Mr. Livermore's great-grandfather came to California to work in the gold fields and his grandfather became a founding director of PG&E when he sold the family's Sacramento-area power company, his parents, Caroline Sealy Livermore and George Banks Livermore, were both prominent conservationists.

As a member of the San Francisco law firm Chickering & Gregory for more than 50 years, Mr. Livermore specialized in conservation law and was co-author of "The Conservation Easement in California," which still is required reading in many environmental law classes.

Mr. Livermore was also a figure in state and local politics for years. He was chairman of the San Francisco Republican Central Committee in the 1960s and became head of the state Republican Party in 1971.

It was a different political time in San Francisco during the 1960s and early 1970s, when moderate Republicans like Assemblyman Milton Marks and Rep. Bill Maillard were powerful officeholders.

Mr. Livermore "was a good guy," said John Burton, a former Bay Area legislator who now heads the state Democratic Party. "I don't think he'd fit the Republican Party today, since

either they wouldn't want him or he wouldn't want them."

Mr. Livermore, whose brother, Ike, was Gov. Ronald Reagan's secretary for natural resources for eight years, was a friend of the governor and did some political legal work for him.

Bill Bagley, a former Marin County GOP legislator, was a longtime friend of Mr. Livermore and the rest of his family, which lived in Ross.

Mr. Livermore "was a classic moderate Republican," Bagley said. "He was a wonderful gentleman, cultured, personable and friendly."

His conservation efforts extended to the city of his birth. For more than 100 years, Mr. Livermore's family owned a big piece of San Francisco's Russian Hill, where, when he was 5 or 6 years old, it was "my job was to chase the neighborhood kids out of the orchard," he told a Chronicle reporter in 2003.

In 1962, as president

of the Old Russian Hill Association, he fought plans for a 20-story high-rise on the crest of Russian Hill. In its place, Mr. Livermore helped develop the award-winning, low-rise Hermitage Apartments.

Mr. Livermore "was instrumental in preventing high-rises there," the late Allan Temko, The Chronicle's Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic, said at the time. "Putnam is a gentleman of the old school."

Mr. Livermore is survived by his wife, Pari, and numerous nieces and nephews. A celebration of his life will be held at 2 p.m. Jan. 16 at St. John's Episcopal Church, 14 Lagunitas Road, Ross. The family suggests donations be made to the Trust for Public Land.

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