



SHOW NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE SHOW NOTES

- Episode Title:** San Mateo's Own: Claire Giannini Hoffman
- Episode # & Date:** Episode #26 – April 22, 2020
- About this Episode:** Judy continues her exploration of one of San Mateo's most famous and influential natives, Claire Giannini Hoffman, BofA board member, philanthropist, and daughter of the bank's founder A.P. Giannini.
- Episode Web Page:** <https://sanmateofocus.com/claire-giannini-hoffman/>

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

I'm Judy Gordon, and *this* is San Mateo Focus.

Claire Giannini Hoffman said that there were just two areas where her father the great American banker, AP Giannini, spoiled her. One was teaching her about fine French champagne and the other involved allowing her to keep the estate home that was so important to her: Seven Oaks in San Mateo. Seven Oaks is owned privately today and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Both Claire and AP Giannini lived at Seven Oaks until their deaths, his in 1949 and hers in 1997. Claire was married to Biff Hoffman, an investment banker, from 1930 until his death in 1954. They did not have children. In her early 70s and while still a member of the Board of Directors at the Bank of America, she sat down for a series of interviews that are transcribed and the property of the Bancroft Library at the University of California. What made these interviews interesting and a bit dramatic is that she requested the manuscript be closed to the public from 1976 until January 1, 2006.

Although most of the questions have to do with her father's, and then later her own, involvement as a Board Member of the Bank of America, they provide a glimpse into life at Seven Oaks in the early part of the 20th century when the house bustled with family and activities. Claire was the youngest of eight children in the family. Only three lived until adulthood, Claire and her two brothers. Claire's mother Clorinda married AP in 1892. Clorinda and AP had a very good relationship according to Claire. Their main interest was the well-being of their family. Clorinda Giannini was a true partner to AP and had a great influence on him. She was a simple, sweet, and gracious person but devoted to AP. The house was always full of friends from schools, local family members, and San Mateo neighbors. Claire said that friends liked to be in the Giannini home because it was a happy home. They put mattresses on the floor and later slept outdoors for part of the year in a sleeping porch on the balcony, girls on one side and boys on the other.

In the interview, Claire talks about how the entire family had to wait for AP to arrive home for dinner before they ate together. There were times when they were eating as late as 10pm. Clorinda never let those late nights bother her, but Claire said that the children would get so hungry that they would sneak into the kitchen and beg for bread from their cook. The Giannini family traveled quite a bit by



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car, all over the United States and Europe. AP never drove and always had a driver. Several times in the interview Claire said that she never took long rides after she became an adult because all the mishaps from long car tours in the early part of the 20th century had ruined her taste for that type of travel. Tire punctures, blowouts, and sleeping in the car because they were stranded was what she recalls. Claire had wished that she could stay at home at Seven Oaks in San Mateo with her local aunts caring for her. But AP was firm that the family travel together. Later in life, Claire as an assistant at Bank of America to her father, traveled all over the world with him. When the city of San Mateo began growing up all around Seven Oaks her father wanted to sell the home. He had already sold off parcels of the estate land because he believed in progress and the growth of San Mateo. Claire begged him to let her keep Seven Oaks. She said that she had been traveling and living out of suitcases for too long. So, AP agreed to let her have the old house when he died.

When AP died in 1949, Claire took over his seat on the Board of Directors making her the first female director of the bank. In fact, for about 20 years she was the only woman guest invited at international bank conference events for the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the International Development Association. She was extremely loyal to her father's banking principles and policies and credited her mother for teaching her how to focus on corporate goals. Claire was a pioneer in advocating for women's equal pay and business opportunities. In 1963, she became the first female director on Sears, Roebuck & Company's board. Claire made waves in the business world when she resigned her seat on the B of A Board of Directors in 1985 with an attack on the management. She was very unhappy with the decision to sell the bank's San Francisco headquarters. Phrases like "appalling, truly unpardonable," "corporate self-interest, insincerity, and insensitivity" laced her very public resignation letter.

Upon her death in 1997 she requested that Seven Oaks be torn down and a Children's Hospital built in its place. That did not happen and after the efforts of a group of people including the City of San Mateo to put the house on the National Register of Historic Places, the estate of Claire Giannini Hoffman sold the home to a small San Jose non-profit for \$1 who later sold it to a private buyer. But, the story of Claire Giannini Hoffman doesn't end there. In 2010, Hilda Yao who took over managing the estate after her mother Dorothy Yao's death, called up [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org). She asked how much it would take to fund every single California teacher project on the site. The head of DonorsChoose estimated it would be more than one million dollars. A check for \$1.3 million was sent to DonorsChoose from the Claire Giannini Fund.

The next time you're in the area, from the street you can peek into the Seven Oaks estate and imagine the active and happy Giannini family living their lives in San Mateo and think about their influence in changing the world during their time. There's so much more to the Giannini story, so *Here's the Deal*: Links to the Bancroft Library interview along with other links are on our episode page at [sanmateofocus.com](https://www.sanmateofocus.com). And, we've included a link to a recent podcast episode of Masters of Scale - where Reid Hoffman interviews DonorsChoose founder Charles Best. You'll hear what courageous



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teachers all over the country need to continue offering a quality education to their students, and you might just want to help out.

Okay, that's all the time we have for this episode. Have a great week. Thanks to Jack Radsliff for the original music to this podcast. If you'd like more information about our sponsor or the topics in today's episode, go to sanmateofocus.com.

HELPFUL LINKS:

[PDF of 1976 Interview with Claire Giannini Hoffman](#)

[Webpage: Bio - Claire Giannini Hoffman](#)

[Webpage: Bio - Biff Hoffman \(Claire Giannini's Husband\)](#)

[LA Times Article: Claire Giannini Hoffman Resigns from BofA Board](#)

[Interview: Charles Best of DonorsChoose](#)

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PODCAST SHOW NOTES

Podcast Name: San Mateo Focus

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Description: Whether you're new to San Mateo, California, or a long time resident, the San Mateo Focus Podcast is the place to learn about local history, good eats, and things to do.

Website: <http://www.sanmateofocus.com>

Email: info@sanmateofocus.com

Host & Founder: Judy Gordon

Producer/Co-host: Peter Radsliff

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