

FATHER'S FAMILY, THE HILLSES



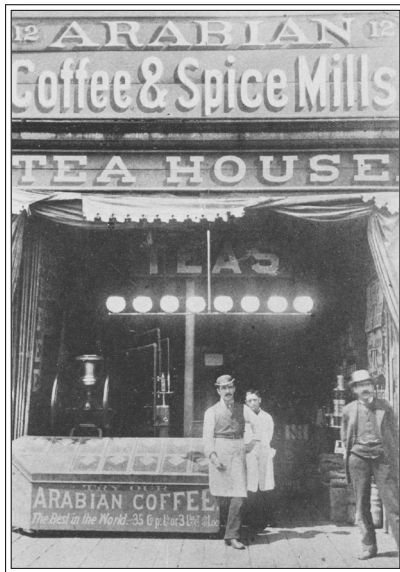
The first member of the Hills family to come to America arrived from England in 1638 and settled in Warren, Maine. One of his descendents was captain of a whaling ship and died at sea.

My great-grandfather, Austin Hills, was a shipwright and master builder. He left Maine in 1863 and came to San Francisco to design and build ferries. In 1873, his sons Reuben and Austin (A.H.) joined him in the Bay Area.

Five years later, Reuben and A.H. formed a partnership called Hills Bros. to sell butter and eggs at a stall in the Bay City Market. In 1882, they bought a second outlet, where they roasted coffee for both stores. They also sold teas and spices.

As their business grew, they wanted to can butter for export. This led to an innovative new process called vacuum packing. Soon, they were packing coffee this way and their business expanded even more.

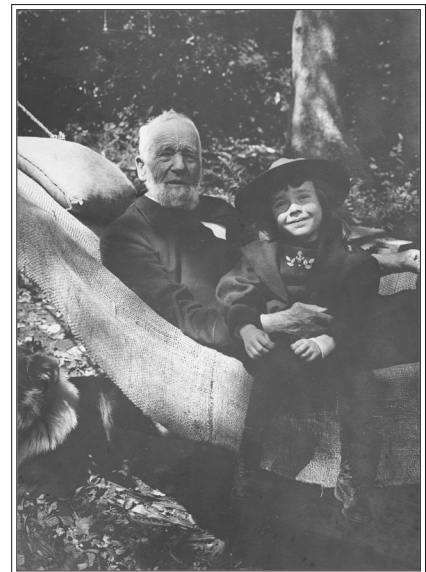
In 1926, the company moved to a new plant they had built at No. 2 Harrison St. I really liked this place, as Father's office overlooked the waterfront and we could stand at his window and watch the Bay Bridge being built. When he brought magazines home and we flipped through the pages, the smell of roasted coffee wafted out.



*First Hills Bros. retail shop at
12 Fourth Street, San Francisco, 1882.*



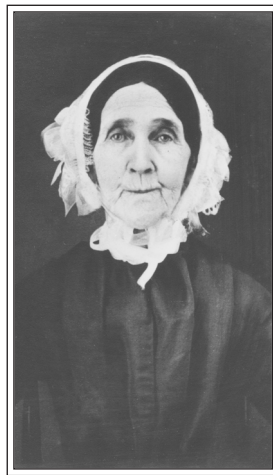
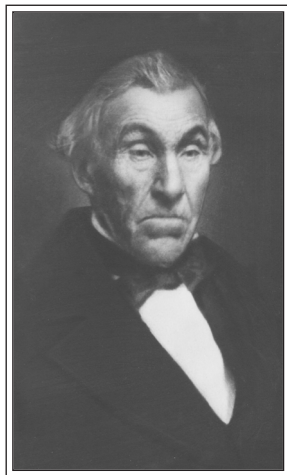
*Reuben W. Hills,
my grandfather.*



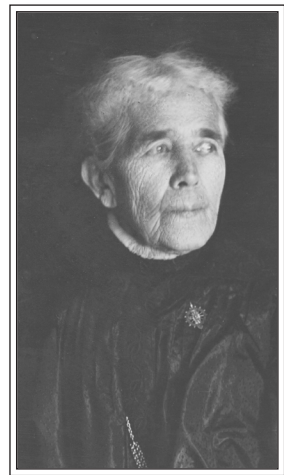
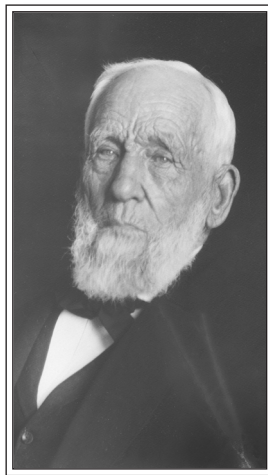
*My great-grandfather Austin Hills
with Leslie, my father.*



The Hills Bros. warehouse at Sacramento & Sansome Streets, 1917.



Joseph Hills (1602-1688) and Rose Clark Hills.



*My great-grandparents,
Austin Herbert Hills, Sr. and Harriet Heald Hills.*



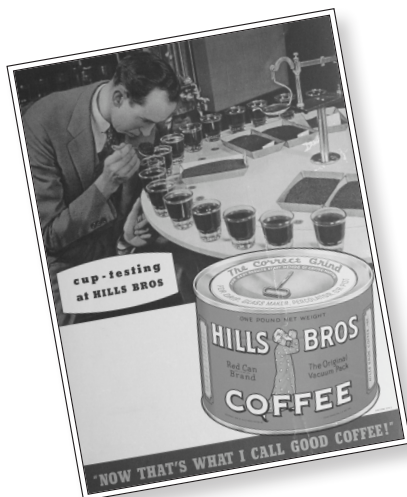
The 50th anniversary of Austin and Harriet Hills, July 6, 1900. I was named (with an extra 't' added) after my great-grandmother. A.H. Hills stands at the far end of the table, in front of the door; his brothers Reuben (looking away) and Ernest are to his right.

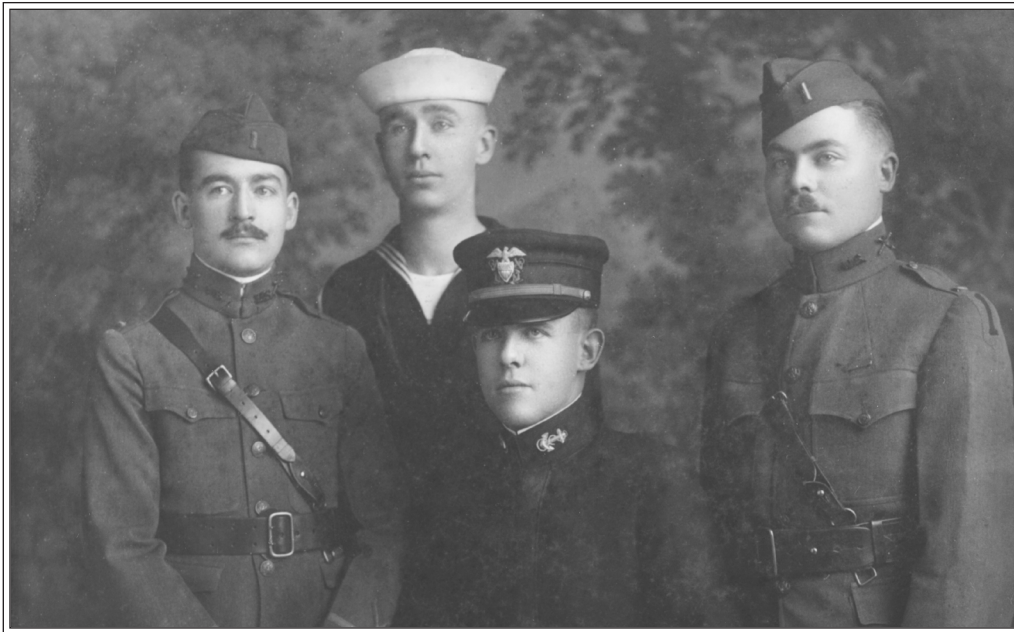


Reuben W. Hills, my grandfather (l.), and his brother A.H. Hills.

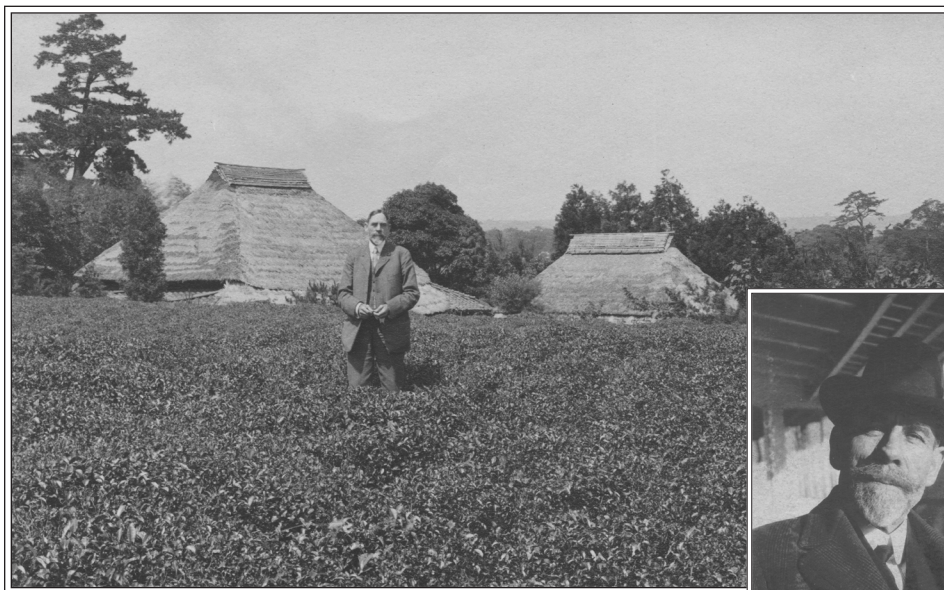


*Groundbreaking for the new plant at 2 Harrison St. on the Embarcadero, August 12, 1924.
From l., A.H., his son Gray, Leslie, Ed, Reuben Jr., and R.W. Hills.*

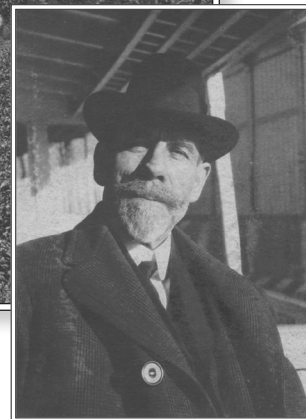




Sons of A.H. and R.W. Hills in World War I (from l.), Reuben Jr., Leslie, Gray and Edward Hills.



Grandfather Reuben Hills in Japan on a tea-buying trip for Hills Bros.





*Mary Lee and me with Grandfather
Reuben Hills, early 1930s.*



Grandmother Minnie Hills.

In 1939, the company built a plant in New Jersey. Then, in 1976, after 98 years of family ownership, they sold out. Now Nestlé owns the Hills Bros. label.



Grandfather Reuben Hills, born on May 25, 1856, lived in a house on Broderick St. He owned a wonderful apricot ranch in the Los Altos hills with lots of rooms and orchards and flowers, but he didn't use it anymore. I remember seeing him there just once, for a family reunion.

My father would take us to see him on Broderick Street, and Grandfather Hills would be sitting in his upstairs library. It was full of yellow-covered *National Geographics* that Mary Lee and I looked at while the men talked.

He always gave us pearls for our add-a-pearl necklaces. These were tiny gold chains that had three little pearls when you first got them. On special occasions such as Christmas and birthdays, more pearls were added.

Grandfather Hills rarely left his house. He had bad asthma and a very painful intestinal problem. He didn't go out very much except to the office. When we were older he was always in bed when we came to visit.

One day I found a lovely gold rose in our rather decrepit garden and brought it to him. He said it was his favorite rose, so after that I always brought him one if the bush was in bloom.

Grandfather Hills was almost completely bald. He wore a hairpiece, which I didn't realize.

Once, when Mother and I were talking about men's hair, I said, "Grandfather Hills had good hair."

Mother said, "Oh, no, he was bald. He always wore a wig."

Grandfather Hills never had a wife, as far as I knew, so I assumed he was a widower. No one ever mentioned Grandmother Hills.

One day when Mother and I were out walking near Grandfather's home, a neighbor who recognized Mother started to talk about "poor Mrs. Hills on the third floor." After we parted, I asked Mother about it. She said she'd never met her mother-in-law, but that Minnie Hills lived upstairs on the third floor. My father must have visited her, but he never spoke about her.



Leslie with his parents and his dog, and in college. As a boy he attended Grant Primary School, on Pacific Avenue near Broderick Street.