

Woman's Club of Palo Alto HISTORIC MEMBER WALKING TOUR

By Carolyn Pierce

Photos by Sue Krumbein

Welcome to the Woman's Club walking tour! The focus is on historic member-related places and residences along the Homer Avenue corridor.

As you visit these sites and read the stories of their inhabitants, you will learn about Palo Alto's past and the lives of our early Club members.

You may either print this as your walking guide or take an armchair tour from the comfort of your home using the photos provided.

Start your tour here:

737 Bryant:



This handsome 1903 Colonial Revival residence was the former home of Louise and Major Henry Perry. The Perry's home is currently being used as office space, which is certainly what has saved the home from demolition. The conversion from residential to commercial occurred in 1957 when the building was purchased by the Palo Alto Medical Clinic.

Since this is the Woman's Club Historic Member Tour, it goes without saying that Louise Perry was indeed a member, but initially it was very difficult to discover her first name. This is because around 1900 the women listed in our oldest Club rosters began identifying themselves by their husband's first name or initials, rather than their own first name. For example, I would have been listed in the 1906 Club directory as Mrs. S. R. Pierce, instead of the more personal, "Carolyn Pierce" that you might have seen in 1896 roster just 10 years earlier.

This patriarchal form of designation partially has its roots in the status that marriage bestowed upon women of the era, but it's greatly increased usage after 1900 was suspiciously coincident with the height of the women's suffrage movement. At the turn of the 20th Century, a woman's right to vote felt a little threatening to both genders. And the Woman's Club was nothing, if not the epicenter, of suffragist activity in Palo Alto.

Not only was there concern about the loss of social structure that women's suffrage threatened, but the Temperance movement was also perceived as suspiciously close to the female heart. Therefore, this attempt to signify a woman's closer identification with her husband might have been a small act of reassurance to everyone during those most fraught years of the suffrage movement. (1897-1919). *Here are some postcard cartoons expressing those lurking fears:*



Louise Perry, the club member who lived at 737 Bryant Street, is a good case in point. She was found in the 1905 Woman's Club roster as Mrs. H. F. Perry, so several genealogy sites had to be consulted to determine her true name. Since we know so little about her life beyond the towns in which she lived and the number of her children, it is a particular pleasure to at least restore Louise's true name to her.

We know much more about Louise's husband, Henry. He was a schoolteacher, but at age 23, enlisted to fight for the Union during the Civil War. Despite receiving a bullet to his

shoulder at Perryville (Kentucky), and another in the chest at Jonesboro (near Atlanta), Henry survived the war. Given the state of medicine and hygiene on the 19th century battlefield, this is no small miracle.

Actually, Henry more than survived. He was promoted to the rank of major, a title he retained ever after, and part of why we will now refer to him as Lucky Henry. Not only did he not die, he was promoted!

After the Civil War, Henry and his brother opened a limestone quarry in their home state of Indiana, where they became exceedingly successful. Their timing couldn't have been better as limestone was just coming into high demand as the building material of choice. Leaping forward 25 years - after marriage to Louise and four children - Henry left the Limestone business and moved to California to commence gold dredging operations on the Feather River. Naturally, the ever-lucky Henry happily found that the 335 acres he had bonded to dredge were rich in gold ore.

Of course, we're talking about gold here, so many others were also working the river. Unfortunately, the combined dredging activity of numerous mining operations so compromised the sandbars and natural rock barriers along the Feather River that several catastrophic floods occurred in and around the town of Oroville. These floods drowned quite a number of people and destroyed valuable dredging equipment. It was a huge financial loss for most miners; but undaunted, the Perry brothers re-grouped and were able to continue their very prosperous enterprise thanks to the Perry's son, Orville.

Louise and Lucky Henry's young son, Orville, had grown up to be a very capable engineer. He devised a new type dredge so competent, it replaced all others and is still used today.

Here are photos of how the Perry dredge may have looked:



Around 1901, the Perry's daughter contracted malaria while they were residing in the Oroville area. The illness was very serious and prompted Louise to insist on a move to the Santa Clara Valley – a place she had heard was sunny and mild. The town they selected was Palo Alto. While living in Palo Alto, Lucky Henry invested in Palo Alto land and owned all of valuable Block 20 - bounded by University, Lytton, Waverley & Bryant.

So, despite war, two bullet holes, floods, and a cross-country relocation, Good Fortune never deserted Lucky Henry, who lived to be 86 years old, and quite a rich old rascal, too.

Please return to the corner of Bryant Street and Homer Avenue.

816 Bryant: (office building at corner of Bryant and Homer)



Pause at this corner for a moment to notice this attractive office building. This was once the residential site of early Club member, Alta Zink, and her husband, Howard, the Chief of Police throughout the Great Depression and WWII.

Both Alta and Howard Zink were kindhearted people, who were very concerned with sheltering and feeding the flood of dispossessed men flooding through Palo Alto during the depression of the 1930's. Along with several other citizens, they established the "Hotel de Zink" in an old warehouse where a man could get a shower, a bed for the night, and a free breakfast.

Through the Woman's Club, Alta also organized the "Friendly Woodyard". This was located in a vacant lot where unemployed or displaced men could earn a little cash by chopping wood.

Below are photos of men queued up to receive food at the Hotel de Zink, as well as one of the police station circa 1925:



Under Chief Zink's leadership, it was said that Palo Alto had one of the five best police departments in the U.S. As Chief of Police, he was able to achieve this through tough exams, a high level of training, and high salaries that were instituted during his years of leadership. He was also the first to introduce many modern techniques to Palo Alto's police force – including fingerprinting, photography, crime scene investigation, and first aid. Howard Zink is the man who laid the foundation for the fine police department we enjoy today.

Before we move on, there's a cute little story about the Zinks that I found in one of Alta's letters to her cousin. Alta wrote, *"Whenever Howard would thrill our grandchildren with stories about one of his maternal grandmothers who had been killed by Indians in 1689, I would volley back that my great-great grandmother, Elizabeth Fautleroy, was one of the three women who refused to marry George Washington."*

As you can see, his policework wasn't the only area where Howard had his hands full. Alta was a feisty one!

Now continue west on Homer and turn left; make a left at the next corner (Ramona St.). Pause in front of the former AME Zion Church.

819 Ramona Street: (Now a fitness center)



You are standing before the University AME Zion Church, built in 1925. The AME stands for African Methodist Episcopal, and this was the first African-American church on the peninsula. At the time of construction, there were very few African-American people in the area, and since their numbers were so thin, this church became the central rendezvous point for their social life.

Here is a photo of Seaman "Pop" Harris. Pop arrived in Palo Alto in 1925 and was a member of the University AME Zion Church.



Interestingly, African-Americans were so few in number - - as compared with the local Chinese and Japanese communities - - they were seen more as individual people and were better accepted than other groups who were viewed as cultural or economic threats.

With so few to enjoy it, you might be wondering at this privileged location in the middle of prime downtown Palo Alto. Yet in the mid-1920's, this area straddled the downtown business zone and Professorville residences and was very different from what it is today. At the time, it contained laundries, lumber yards, bakeries, and so forth, with working class homes commingling with the commercial. Naturally, everyone, black or white, agreed that it was a fine place for a church, and you will spot other denominations sprinkled along the Homer corridor.

Historically, Palo Alto has always been a very socially progressive town, yet there were several notable acts of racism and exclusion over the years. One such act of intolerance happened in 1920. This was a proposed Chamber of Commerce resolution calling for a segregated district for the "Oriental and colored people" of the town.

This resolution was more than a bit awkward because there were already ten African-American families living in Palo Alto who owned local property with a combined value of \$100,000, none of which was mortgaged! One of their number was also bank director.

In response to the Chamber's resolution, Henry Dodson, a resident and African-American spokesman, commented in an editorial: *"agitation for such an ordinance will only create race prejudice and cause race friction, and engender strife and discord where all before was peace and harmony; thereby lowering the morals of the community."*

I'm happy to report that Henry Dodson's point was taken, and the resolution never passed. Yet, from 1925 through the 1950's, most racial discrimination took the form of neighborhood sub-division covenants banning persons of color. Notably, the developer, Joseph Eichler, proved to be the single exception to this by refusing to allow any such restrictions in his projects. With Joe Eichler, if you could afford it, you could buy it.

On the positive side of racial brotherhood, it was Palo Alto's citizens who saved the AME Zion Church from foreclosure during the height of the Great Depression. Although everyone was experiencing tight times, residents collected over \$6,000 through fundraisers and personal donation, and by 1939, the mortgage was paid off. I'm happy to report that the Woman's Club gave considerable support to this cause.

Return to Homer St. and turn left. Continue walking west one block, turn left on Emerson to discover this monument.

933 Emerson: Electronics Research Laboratory Monument



Early in the 20th century, ordinary citizens heard about the day's news on a newfangled contraption called a radio. The genesis was right here in Palo Alto.

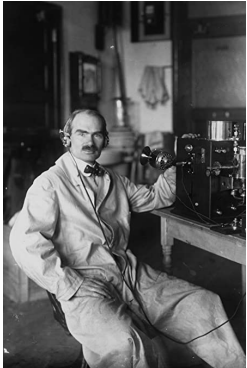
Frequently, called the "Father of Radio", Palo Alto resident, Lee De Forest invented the Audion, a three-electrode vacuum tube that was able to amplify sound. The year was 1906, and this is the site of the laboratory in which he developed his creation.

Photo of former laboratory on this site:



In truth, much of the foundation for the electronic age is said to have been laid by De Forest. He is also credited with bringing sound to movies. For his part, De Forest was hoping that his inventions would bring a higher level of culture to the world, but he was deeply disappointed when the medium began to fill with pop songs, jazz and tacky advertisements.

Photos of Lee De Forest with the Audion, his lab located at 933 Emerson, & Mary.



Sadly, Mr. De Forest was not as lucky in his personal life as he was in his career. His Palo Alto wife, Mary, was this third wife – one of four over his long 88-year lifetime.

Mary was among the earliest members of the Palo Alto Woman's Club where she occasionally sang for events. While living in Palo Alto, she kept their home at 130 Cowper Street (located just southeast of Embarcadero Road). She had been known professionally as Mary Mayo, and before marriage had been a beautiful and talented opera singer of the New York stage. Since De Forest was a person of culture – both a lover of opera and beautiful women – Mary seemed to have everything he wanted in a woman.

The couple had two daughters and a son, who died only days after his birth. This tragedy was soon followed by the De Forests' separation and eventual divorce around 1929. This was something quite unusual for the era.

In short, De Forest worked too much and Mary drank too much. From the distance of time, it's very hard to tell which was a reaction to which. Though they lived in Palo Alto for only a few years, the couple made a significant contribution to Palo Alto's growing reputation as a city of innovation and culture.

Return to Homer Street and walk northeast to Bryant Street, then turn right and walk a block and a half to the next destination at 904 Bryant.

940-944 Bryant (1912):



Spinsters Ella Kelly & Alice Kelly lived in these cottages and were both longtime Woman's Club members.

Trained as a teacher at what was initially the San Jose State Teacher's College, Ella Kelly came to Palo Alto in 1922. She was active in the Woman's Club, the Temperance Union, and taught in our local elementary school.

Ella's younger sister, Alice Kelly, who shared the 940 Bryant cottage with her, began her professional life in Palo Alto as the assistant postmistress. Alice said her job as postmistress distinguished her as "the person who distributed the first mail ever received by the Palo Alto post office." This was true because she was working at her postal station on August 4, 1894, the day the city was incorporated.

Alice is also notable as a female photographer, a field not commonly open to women in the 1920's. She even had her own studio built next door to the Kelly house. She called it the "Bungalow Photographic Studio." 944 Bryant was that studio, though it is now a single-family residence. The present kitchen in the structure was the original dark room.

Return to Homer Avenue and turn right. Continue northeast for 2 blocks, then turn right on Waverley Street. Stop at 807 Waverly.

807 Waverley:



This is the home of Sadie and Robert Hackley. Both Sadie and Robert loved Palo Alto, and Sadie was an active member of the nearby Woman's Club.

Robert came here in 1904 to attend Stanford, and like the man who came for dinner, he remained until his death. He took an active interest in civic affairs and ran a small pest

control business after retiring as a civil engineer. He even taught nautical navigation to the Boy Scouts as his “give back” to the community.

But Robert had another side, some might think it a “darker” side, because he was also a well-known city council gadfly. Robert spoke out regularly on fiscal matters, and it was his custom to make a formal citizen’s presentation at each budget hearing. As we know, this kind of civic activity is not always appreciated, but at the time of Robert’s death, the mayor graciously said his passing was a loss to the community because many of Robert’s ideas were quite constructive.

In 1946, after a hard-working life, Robert died from head wounds he received from being hit by a car in the downtown area. The accident was splashed all over the local newspapers and shocked many people into realizing that street safety was something that needed immediate addressing.

If anything, conditions for pedestrians are even worse today with the greater numbers of cars, buses, and bicycles on our streets - along with the added spice of the occasional zippy skateboarder. At certain times of high activity, Downtown can feel as if you’ve landed in a living game of Grand Auto. Seventy-four years later, we are still looking for that safety solution.

Return to Homer Avenue and turn right. Continue northeast for 2 blocks. The last stop in this tour is 460 Homer.

460 Homer: Last stop



It was 1911 when Fanny Lucy first moved into this little Craftsman bungalow. She was a 29-year old woman, freshly widowed, with three small children, one of whom was only 6-months old. Fanny had been married for five years to Allen Lucy, a mining engineer in rough and tumble Goldfield, Colorado, where he was killed in a mining accident under very questionable circumstances.

It seems the management of the mine where Allen worked suspected that their employees were filching gold from the operation. Allen Lucy, as supervisor, found it his job to warn the workmen about their suspected thefts, and he was instructed to threaten punitive action, if the thieving persisted.

Several days after Allen gave his warning, he stepped on a plank placed over an open shaft where he would have to cross on his regular rounds. The plank, which had been sawn halfway through on the underside, failed under his weight, and he plunged to his death. Sadly, there is no record of anyone being prosecuted for the actions causing Allen's death; but fitly, the town of Goldfield is now a ghost, too.

At Allen's death, heavily pregnant Fanny chose to join her married brother, Ralph, who was living in Palo Alto. Rough as Goldfield was, she knew it was no place for the birth of a baby.

Photo of Goldfield, CO -



It was Fanny's brother, Ralph, who built this home for his sister, and remarkably, Fanny owned it free and clear all her life. She raised her three children within its walls, and joined the nearby Woman's Club for friendship.

By the late 1920's, Fanny's funds were running short, so she took a job working in one of those newly devised "life insurance" companies to make ends meet. She lived in this house until her death in 1946, and the home remained in the Lucy family until the very recent death of her descendent, Peter Lucy, a local psychiatrist.

In Peter's will, he expressed the desire for the house be used to provide low-cost psychiatric care and help for battered women, but I understand this use was ruled incompatible with the city's zoning. It has since been sold to new owners.

As we enjoy Woman's Club activities at the club, right across the street, it's interesting to think about those who were members long ago. Like us today, they came to Palo Alto for a variety of reasons, but once they were here, they enjoyed the civic nature of the town, and the women, especially, benefitted from friendships they made at the Club and the important work they did in the community.

I hope you enjoyed your walk and will join us for future excursions this fall when Club Days resume! Thank you for joining us.

WCPA Homer Corridor Walking Tour

Untitled layer

- 737 Bryant St
- 816 Bryant St
- 819 Ramona St
- 933 Emerson St
- 807 Waverley St
- 460 Homer Ave

Visit sites of early Woman's Club members' residences.

