

24 Ladies Take Charge

Women's Club makes Corte Madera a better place

*Street lights
are paid for with
women's gold*

*Mary Eastman, shown
here about 1900, was
a community leader in
early Corte Madera.*



OVERALL, MOST OF THE FUNCTIONS NOT relegated to the various boards and commissions seemed to fall to the Women's Club. Founded in 1906, the Women's Club undertook a wide range of community projects to benefit the town.

Nothing escaped the attention of the Women's Club, whose members pitched in to supply hot food for weary firefighters, circulated petitions in favor of women's suffrage and a better road system, planted landscaping along public thoroughfares, garnered plots of land for park use throughout the town, and sustained the residents' social, cultural, and philanthropic activities for many years.

On Christmas Eve in 1907, the town's first 32 street lights, proposed and paid for with \$250 in gold raised by the Women's Club, were lit. It brought a major improvement in safety. The Women's Club also paid the town's electric bills to keep the streetlights shining.

Determined to make Corte Madera cleaner and healthier, the Women's Club also took on the task of improving sanitary conditions. Issues that commanded their attention included proper disposal of rubbish, sanitation at the livery stable and cow corals, mosquito abatement, and removal of poison oak.

The women were also watchful of broken boards in the town's boardwalks, and were willing to supply the materials and hire young boys to do the repairs.



Leading ladies of the Corte Madera Women's Club on Park Day, 1908: from left: Unknown, Mrs. Darling, Charlotte Rude, Mary Hart, Mary McDonald, Mrs. Sammy Woods, Mary Eastman.

From the first, members of the Women's Club were interested in beautifying the town. They decided to clean up the muddy blight around the train station and replace it with a park. M.F. Pixley donated a strip of land for the park, and William Bradbury agreed to furnish sufficient water for irrigation.

Impossible as it may be for today's readers to imagine that anything could be done at lightning speed, the ladies managed to make it happen. The initial meeting of the Women's

Club and the more business-oriented Improvement Club to discuss plans for the project took place on February 11, 1908. On the next day, the site was plowed and graded, with posts set for fencing. Within another day, rock was hauled in for the retaining wall that would form the base of the iron fence to enclose a 100x300 feet area directly opposite the depot.

Photographs of the festive dedication ceremony on Park Day, February 22, 1908, confirm that the entire project was completed from start to finish in less than two weeks.

Widening and beautifying the main street between the railroad station and the stores was another longtime priority for the Women's

Club. With help from the Improvement Club and other local groups, the project was finally organized in 1914. Supervisor Burke promised the use of County horse teams. Rock for the roadbed was donated. Labor and teams were offered from various sources. The railroad company promised dirt and gravel.

Finally, the street was graded and rocked,

On Park Day, February 22, 1908, members of the Women's Club flanked a local dignitary at the dedication of the new Railroad Park that was planned, sponsored, and created by the ladies. It was a linear park that ran parallel to the railroad tracks, on the east side. The park was later moved to the west side of the train station so that Park Street (now Tamalpais Drive) could be widened to its full 40-foot width.

with the right of way graded down to the sidewalk. The narrow parkway was edged with palms and flowers along the entire one block length on the station side. A post and wire fence was installed to protect the plants from being trampled.

All this was just the beginning of what the Women's Club had in mind.

The ladies petitioned Congress on behalf of women's suffrage until women finally obtained the right to vote in 1920.

They worked tirelessly to raise money for town improvements by doing fine stitchery and other handwork, holding bake sales, and organizing cultural or social events.



When fires occurred, they took care of the stricken families until they could be reestablished. If there were forest fires in the area, the ladies worked around the clock to feed teams of weary firefighters.

During the Depression, the club collected donations of food, clothing, furniture and wood for neighbors in need.

In later years, the Women's Club adopted elementary school classes at local schools and

provided support for wounded veterans.

When the Recreation Center was built in 1951, funding was donated by the Women's Club from the sale of a lot purchased for their own building. The club then raised funds each year to add amenities to the Rec Center.

To this day, members of the Women's Club continue to work with other town organizations on many local causes. ❧

Railroad Park in Old Corte Madera Square was landscaped and maintained for many years by members of the Corte Madera Women's Club for the enjoyment of the community. This view of the Square shows the park in 1926.

