

Far Reaching Effects of Women's Clubs Working Together

What do libraries, redwoods, Rosie the Riveter, the white line in middle of highway, Safe Surrender Baby California, and Bells of Camino Real have to do with our Club? They are all historically noteworthy collaborations and long-term efforts AWC participated in with our umbrella organizations, GFWC and CFWC.

In 1921 AWC affiliated with a nationwide organization **General Federated Women's Clubs** (founded in 1890) and **California Federated Women's Clubs** (organized in 1900). We are still part of the 20 club Mt. Diablo District within CFWC. A portion of each member's annual dues go to these organizations with a larger amount to GFWC and a minimal amount to CFWC and Mt. Diablo District.

Save The Redwoods: Beginning in late 1890's newly formed women's clubs began trying to save California's redwood groves. The clubs prevailed in 1901 when the California Governor signed the bill marking **Big Basin as the first California State Park**. Their efforts included lobbying by women's clubs throughout the state sending telegrams to legislators. After the successful effort at Big Basin, other areas of protecting the redwoods were pursued. Numerous Sacramento legislative visits were joined for many years in this ongoing effort.



Bells of El Camino Real: Two women's groups in 1900 wanted to save the missions by marking the historic El Camino Real which connected the

missions. The two groups were the newly formed California Federated Women's Club and the Native Daughters of the Golden West. They collaborated and chose bells to mark the highways showing the distance to the nearest town. Other civic groups joined their efforts. The first bell was installed in 1906. Ninety years later a second push was underway by CFWC to repair prior bells, replace lost bells and erect more. The Alamo Women's Club joined in this effort via President Marcelle Roise's President's Project in 1996/97. The AWC bell is located on El Camino Real at the San Mateo bridge exit on Highway 92.



The White Line: In 1917 Dr. June McCarroll was almost run off the road which began her quest to save lives by having a white line painted in the middle of roadways to delineate lanes. She began lobbying with her CFWC Indio Women's Club and the momentum grew. She eventually convinced the CA Chairman of the Highway Commission to try her idea. About 3500 miles of roads were striped at the time. In 1932, ironically, the California State Chamber of Commerce was looking for the 'man' who suggested the idea! Her idea and gender were finally acknowledged and in 2002 Interstate 10 was dedicated in her honor as "The Dr. June McCarroll Memorial Freeway".

Libraries: Nationwide 75% of **all** U.S. public libraries were founded via women's clubs. GFWC is recognized by the American Library Association for that effort. At home, AWC founded, rented space, staffed and chaired the **Contra Costa Library's Alamo Branch** from 1922

until 1970 when the last vestige of the library was discontinued by Contra Costa County. In 2014 with our clubhouse renovation, the library shelves in the vestibule were moved to the shed as storage – it is the last remnant of fifty years of library service to the Alamo Community by AWC.

Humboldt Redwoods: In 1931, after decades of preserving the redwoods as noted above, CFWC itself purchased an endangered redwood grove in Humboldt County. They collected \$1 from each member saving enough in 1928 to buy the 89 acres. The California Parks Department matched their fundraising efforts. At the time, the grove contained one of the ten tallest trees in the world at more than 300 feet high. Today many of the trees are 50 ft. in diameter and are more than 1000 years old.



CFWC Hearthstone of Humboldt Redwoods Park: Julia Morgan, designer of Hearst Castle, was hired in 1933 to design a memorial for the successful CFWC effort to purchase the Humboldt Redwood Grove mentioned above. The hearthstone dedicates the grove as the “California Federation of Women’s Clubs Grove”. There are four stone fireplaces in the Grove which included large rocks from the Eel River with each hearth containing a different engraved quote. Interestingly, in the early years of AWC our minutes mention many picnics held in the local Alamo ‘redwood grove’ off Stone Valley Road. The grove was neither preserved nor was any attempt made, as far as we know, to save it.



Rosie the Riveter: The Richmond *Rosie the Riveter Memorial* began as a public art project of the mid 1990’s and evolved into a National Parks property in 2000. It happened in the late 1990’s that an Alameda Women’s Club District member brought to CFWC support of the memorial as a national park. A resolution was passed, approved and went to the national organization for approval. With the added support of GFWC and its 90,000 members, the park service agreed. At the time, Carol Lopez Lucey (member of GFWC Dublin/San Ramon Women’s Club) was President of CFWC and she recalls getting the exciting news it had become a national park.

Safe Surrender Baby Law – No Shame, No Blame, No Names: In 2001 California adopted the law in the first 72 hours after birth babies could be surrendered without legal repercussions for the mother. The surrender was limited to hospitals with emergency rooms. The President of Federated Women’s Club of Antioch began lobbying Contra Costa County to expand to fire departments so as to increase drop off sites from 8 to over 88. As a result of this effort the President of Antioch, Elizabeth Rimbault, was named Contra Costa County’s representative Woman of the year by CA House Rep., Joe Canciamilla.

In conclusion: AWC locally makes a difference in our community which can be seen at each of our meetings. Now you know of the many other significant and positive changes women’s clubs accomplished, working together through years of volunteer work.

Vicki Koc, Historian
November, 2022