

OUR TOWN

1910 - 1920

Iva Langness

Our Town is really my Town because I was born here. My paternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Rice, came to Fair Oaks in 1902. My maternal grandparents, Samuel and Ada Osgood, came to Fair Oaks before that on the second excursion train from the East.

Fair Oaks in the years 1910-1920 was a busy happy village. Those were the days when no one locked his door and nearly everyone was related. After church and the big Sunday dinner, it was a pleasure to take a leisurely drive down Winding Way to Del Paso Park, or walk out to the East End School, or maybe picnic in the evening at Sailor Bar.

Downtown Fair Oaks with the imposing Murphy Building, the Slocum and Gore two-story store on California Avenue, the bank, the lumber yard, post office and barber shop was a noteworthy village.

The Plaza was the town square with its newly planted palm trees. There was no lawn but the grade school students held a May Pole dance there every year.

I attended grade school in the schoolhouse where the Community Center is, as did my parents. It was an imposing two-story building, four rooms, two down and two upstairs, and two grades to each room and one teacher to each room. We lined up in front of the school, saluted the flag, and marched to our room. Each room was heated with a large pot-bellied stove.

Across the road was a cement-block watering trough with a white arbor. Up on the back of the hill were sheds for horses for those who rode to school.

About where the amphitheater is located was a large green home and the telephone office was located in the front part and the rest was living quarters. If you wanted to know the news - when the water would shut off, or when it would come on, or where anyone was over town, you would call Polly Rose and get an answer. Polly's father, Mr. Rose, owned the telephone and electric company.

In 1910, Mr. Ollie Beauchamp purchased a Stoddard-Dalton automobile and the Fair Oaks Stageline was established for regular runs to Sacramento.

In 1911, our postal carrier was Mr. Horace Massey who carried the

mail to the entire Fair Oaks District. He would carry stamps for his customers and often a sack of gold bullion from the dredges to be mailed to San Francisco.

About 1911, the Colony was beginning to see acres of the beautiful vineyards south of the American River go before the gold dredges. You could hear the weird noises from the dredges day and night. But, like the noise from the gravel plant, we became so used to the sounds that we had to listen to hear them.

Often the North Fork Ditch would be in need of repair and we would be without water. On the southwest corner of Fair Oaks Blvd. and Main Street there was a tall tower, and when the whistle blew a long blast, we listened and counted the short signals, and if there were four that was how many days we would be without water.

In our house there were special containers for drinking and cooking water. Then, depending on the number of days, we filled everything - bath tub, crocks and even the hot water reservoir on the back of the wood range.

I so well remember one Sunday when Mr. Erick Fulton, the District Superintendent, in his work clothes just walked into church after the service started, whispered to the minister, who then asked us to stand for prayers and then go home as the water would be shut off in an hour. That church was empty in no time!

During this decade, the Fair Oaks Fruit Company and the Olive Packing Plant, located about where the local post office is, were in full production. The buildings covered 44,000 square feet and employed many of the local residents. The Olive Plant had the capacity for crushing 15 tons of raw olives daily, and the citrus crops were the first to be shipped to the East Coast for early market.

In 1918, the active Fair Oaks Civic Club purchased the plaza from John T. Green for \$1800. During the depression of the 30's the Plaza was deeded to the school district and later sold to the Park District.

I must tell you about the blacksmith shops. There were two. Mr. Ike Skidmore's shop was located at Sacramento Street about where the Ice House Antique Shops are. Uncle Immer's (Mr. I. O. Rice) shop was located about where Entrance Street and Sunrise Blvd. meet. We cousins, of which there were a dozen, used to enjoy seeing the horses shod and we loved exploring the side lot of odds and ends of machinery. We would walk down to the shop after school, watch a bit, walk through the Fruit Company lot, cross the Olive Plant grounds, peek into vats of olives being processed, walk through the orange orchard, eating fruit as we found our way to Grandmother Rice's where there were large soft ginger cookies and milk in

wet burlap covered coolers waiting for us.

A little piece of history should not be overlooked. In the back of Stark's Pharmacy, located on the corner of Howard and California Avenue, was a vault left from when the bank was on that corner. If you wanted to get to your safe deposit box, you simply took the Master Key, which hung on a large key ring inside the door, and with the key opened your box, completed your transaction, replaced the key on the ring, thanked Mr. Stark and left.

We grew up spending many hours in the little library. It was located in the building the Park District now occupies. Miss Stewart with her gentle way allowed us to check out any book but one stern glance from her and all giggling stopped.

The Indians of the Hindu Faith, with their intricately wrapped white turbans, their friendly smiles displaying rows of shining gold teeth fascinated us children. There was a large colony of them on the Hale ranch out on Sunset Avenue.

I remember Uncle Bill's (Mr. W. Raymond) wonderful store located on the north side of the Murphy Block. It was about five feet up from the street and was a complete shopping center in itself. There was always a treat for "us kids." Glass cases lined one wall, displaying beans, macaroni and such. The meat box was a large refrigerated box in the corner and there were big round cheeses on the counter and big breadboxes in front for an early a.m. delivery. In the soft summer evenings, the men would come to town, sit around on the breadboxes and discuss the day's events. Many an issue was settled in Uncle Bill's store.

By 1910, the Woman's Thursday Club was well established. It met in the San Juan Hall and to be a member was a "social must" (10000 Fair Oaks Blvd.).

The corner stone for the new clubhouse was laid in 1913 and the building was located just south of the present Crocker Bank (10030 Fair Oaks Blvd.). It was a big beautiful building. The meeting room had a stage with large dressing rooms on each side. On the west side was a glassed in porch where the ladies served refreshments. I was impressed with the special little room off the entry. It was furnished with a beautiful Persian rug, a sofa, chairs, a square table and a special wood burning stove, which Thursday Club uses today. This was the Director's Room where club policy was made. The big social event was the end of the club year at which the Directors wore formals. Special speakers from Sacramento were chosen to be honored guests. New Year's dances and programs for "the boys" at Mather Field were held. Teacher's receptions, teas and Children's Day celebrations were planned in that little room.

The club's Choral Group and the Octet were often busy for social events. Under the direction of Mrs. G. L. Camden, the Octet was judged first in Sutter District competition.

The betterment of the Colony was always a prominent issue at the club meetings. The ladies petitioned the Fair Oaks Fruit Company for a "resting room" for the ladies employed there. Club delegates attended District Conventions, and Reciprocity Luncheons and meetings among the district clubs were always observed. The topic of better roads was a popular issue as well as improvement in education. Also discussed was the topic of Consolidation of City and County Government.

Mather Field was established. The ladies collected silver articles to buy an ambulance, donated money for nurses in France, and made service flags for "the boys." Club members organized a lively Red Cross unit and purchased Liberty Bonds.

Refreshments at the regular meetings were sugarless cookies and grape juice.

In the year 1918, Fair Oaks Blvd. was completed and the Colony acquired an ice cream parlor.

The face of "Our Town" has changed a little, the Plaza palm trees have grown, the buildings have changed their "face," the stage line is modern bus transportation, and the water lines never fail in the hottest of summer days. But looking back, the years 1910-1920 were delightful memorable years and I'm still happy to call Fair Oaks my home.

The 1920's - The Roaring 20's

On the morning of March 4, 1921, in Washington, D.C., a parade of stately touring cars drove down Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House. At the procession's head sat two men in top hat and velvet-collared Chesterfields - Woodrow Wilson, the outgoing president, and his successor, Warren G. Harding.

This was the start of a new decade that found America with old values going sour - a nation unsure of itself.

The new president refused to accept responsibility. Came the oil scandal, Tea Pot Dome, and then the death of the president in 1923.

His successor, Calvin Coolidge, did little more. But the economy started to boom and this became an era of excitement and frivolity.

The Prohibition Amendment became law in 1920. Speakeasies, bathroom gin, and gangsters came on the scene.

It was the era of the First Youth Rebellion.

By the middle of the decade the Flapper style was in. Skirts were shorter than ever. Cloche hats, silk stockings, turned down hose, and bobbed hair were the thing. The autographed yellow rain slicker and open galoshes were in style.

For the men came patterned golf hose, baggy knickers and bow ties, raccoon coats and patent-leather hair, center parted.

On the campus, "sheiks" and "shebas" talked their own language - "Go Fly a Kite", "Banana Oil", "Bees Knees", "Cake Eater", "Giggle Water", "Hotsy Totsy", "Jalopy", "Whoopee!"

Many colleges abolished chapel attendance, legalized smoking for woman, and winked at drinking parties.

The Charleston, Black Bottom, and slow Fox trots were the dances of the time.

Popular tunes to dance to were "Ukulele Lady", "Sweet Georgia Brown", "Running Wild", "Collegiate", "Baby Face", "Ain't We Got Fun", "Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue", "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby", "Barney Google" and the hauntingly beautiful numbers, "Moonlight and Roses", "Blue Skies", "Who", "Tea for Two" from "No, No, Nannette", "Remember" and the many beautiful songs by Irving Berlin, such as "Always".

In the winter of 1924, the musical event of the decade, George Gershwin's "Rhapsody In Blue" made its debut on Broadway with show tunes, "The Man I Love", "I've Got a Crush on You" and "Someone To Watch Over Me."

Hollywood fanned the flames of Flaming Youth with Clara Bow the "It" girl and Joan Crawford in "Our Dancing Daughters." Rudolph Valentino caused the boys to learn to tango and bare their teeth while making love. The first talkie arrived in 1927 in a film "The Jazz Singer" starring Al Jolson.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, the handsome young writer, became famous overnight depicting the Jazz Age.

John Held, Jr. drew its portrait in his cartoons.

Eugene O'Neill was writing intense dramas but the public preferred lighter fare such as "Abie's Irish Rose."

The most successful new product on the market was the radio. People gathered together to hear "Amos and Andy", "The Firestone Orchestra", "The Philco Hour", "Paul Whiteman's Orchestra" and "The Lucky Strike Band."

In the news were: Aimee Semple McPherson, the Evangelist

The Hall-Milk Murder Case

Daddy Browning and his Peaches

The William Desmond Taylor Murder in
Hollywood

The death of Valentino in 1926.

Zany fads swept the country - Dance Marathons and Flagpole Sitting.
The Mah Jongg craze hit and the first Miss America contest was held in
Atlanta City in 1921.

The auto changed the country. Filling stations and tourist courts
appeared on the map.

Suddenly in 1927, the world became smaller. A young pilot, Charles
Lindberg, took off in a tiny plane from Long Island and some 33 hours later
landed in Paris. Americans took to the air and airmail service came of age.

Chain stores spread from coast to coast: Woolworth's, J.C. Penney's,
First National Stores, Western stores, Lerner Shops, Safeway, Piggly Wiggly
Markets, and United Cigar Stores.

Super salesmanship became a performing art, and the Golden Age of
Advertising arrived on the scene. "Enjoy While You Pay" became the
manufacturer's slogan and easy credit opened up new vistas. Stocks were
being bought on margin. Then •••

On October 24, 1929 came the event that brought the decade to a
close and signaled the end of the Coolidge-Hoover prosperity with its dream
of a chicken in every pot. On that day, the stock market suddenly plunged!
The Great depression had begun.

That was the way it was at the end of the 1920's!

How did Fair Oaks and the Thursday Club survive the Torrid
Twenties?

Here is Vivian Saverien to help us relive those days.