

THE FABULOUS 1950's

At the beginning of this decade America was suffering from an increasingly severe case of the jitters which had started soon after the end of World War II. The Soviet Union, with what seemed like sheer malice, had torn up its wartime agreements with the allies and gobbled down half of Europe. Communism, obviously, was out to conquer the world. The only thing that prevented it was America's monopoly of the atomic bomb. Then, just four months before the beginning of the new decade, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb!

President Truman and the public were stunned at this news. All the horrors of Hiroshima seemed about to come home. Our scientists debated if a more powerful bomb, the hydrogen bomb, should be built. Finally, Edward Teller, a physicist, convinced the Administration that the H. Bomb should be built before the Russians built one and dropped it on us.

Then on June 25, 1950, a massive invasion force from Communist North Korea rolled into South Korea and occupied most of the peninsula. Truman ordered American GIs to the battlefield. For the second time in five years, the U.S. was at war.

Civil defense organizations hustled to deal with the political threat. Air raid drills took place and citizens began building their own bomb shelters and stocking them with every thing from Geiger counters and Virginia hams to cases of Scotch!

But the nation got tired of foreboding news and cheered the 1952 election of Dwight Eisenhower, an old soldier who promised peace. But under the surface fear still simmered because just nine months after the U.S. exploded their first H. Bomb, the Russians exploded one in Siberia. Then, in 1957 came the unveiling of a Russian intercontinental missile that could burn up the earth. And only five weeks later the Russians launched their first "Sputnik."

But at the end of the decade, President Eisenhower and Premier Krushchev were meeting in an unexpected friendly atmosphere and we were started on the road to Detente. Even so, the 50's are remembered as the Communist Witch Hunting Days led by Senator Joe McCarthy of Wisconsin.

Now let us look at some personalities of the 50's. The foremost personality of the decade was Dwight Eisenhower whose radiant grin turned out to be worth a record 33 million votes. A Baptist minister, Martin Luther King, emerged as the spokesman for the Negro civil rights movement, James

Dean was every boy's inner vision of himself, and every girl's dream. General Douglas McArthur reached his high point as Allied commander in Korea and was suddenly removed of his command by President Truman. The Athlete Supreme was Willie Mays, centerfielder for the Giants. Charles Van Doren, the star of the quiz show, "Twenty One," was the folk hero of the fifties, but at the decade's end, the world of quiz shows came crashing down when it was revealed that the show was a fake with previously revealed answers. The girl that every girl wanted to be was a tall, red-headed model named Suzie Parker who earned \$100,000 a year. The egg-head of the decade was Governor Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois who ran against Eisenhower in 1952 but was defeated. Movie star Marilyn Monroe was the "sex symbol" of the decade.

Against the backdrop of the cold war and the Space race, dozens of dizzy fads bubbled up in the fifties. The college-bred nonsense of jamming dozens of people in a phone booth or other small space was a product of youth. T.V. generated some fads of its own such as the Davy Crockett market. Hula Hoops became the rage. The consumer market suddenly became green as chlorophyll, a component of plants, introduced 90 products that promised to make their users smell daisy fresh. But the American Medical Association pointed out that goats live on chlorophyll and smell bad just the same! By 1950 there were strange craft in the sky being reported by excited citizens - flying saucers from other planets?

Fads in women's fashions ranged from the hooded dress made up of a single tube to the skirt made very full with crinoline underneath. Dresses were mid-calf length and the Lady-like look of the 40's remained. The odd hairdo for girls was the skull-hugging poodle cut. For boys, the swooping ducktail haircut and the emergence in 1955 of pink shirts, ties, and even hat-bands was a fashion shocker.

Perhaps the oddest of all fads was the disorientation of the English language. Words took on new meanings - cool, hip, smooth, with it, real George, tough or wild, bread, chick, dig, rag, etc.

In the mid-fifties a new group of American-bred Bohemians emerged - calling themselves the Beat Generation. It had a distinctive life and produced its own literature. Names emerging to stay were writers Jack Kerouac, Kenneth Rexroth, and Allen Ginsberg.

The 50's is regarded is a period of change in musical tastes. The effects of increased travel and exposure left a delightful stamp on popular music. Remember such hits as "Tennessee Waltz" (American Folk) "Volare" (Italian), "Vaya Con Dios" (Mexican), and "Mack the Knife" (German)? Such songs as "Canadian Sunset" and "Autumn Leaves" gave

evidence of a poignant style of song writing. In the early fifties, smooth crooners like Eddie Fisher, Harry Belafonte, and Perry Como were popular. Female singers were sleek jazz stylists like Peggy Lee, Lena Horne, and Julie London.

During the mid-fifties, a hip-swingin', guitar slingin' "Rock" singer was making the girls faint. "Hound Dog", "Blue Suede Shoes", and "Jail House Rock" were favorites of the Elvis Presley screamers. Today, radio disc jockeys are still plugging his hits.

Culture in the 50's was in a muddled state. There were some very responsible things done on T.V. such as the premier of Lawrence Olivier's film version of Shakespeare's "Richard III." Classical music was riding a spectacular wave of public interest. A group of innovative painters led by Jackson Pollack dribbled paint on canvas with a stick or poured it directly from a can. A great artist? Well, one of his canvasses sold for \$100,000! Kits for amateur painters with color-coded numbers became very popular.

Broadway set new attendance records with "The Music Man", "Sound of Music", "The King and I", "Flower Drum Song" and "My Fair Lady." Two other successful shows were "Bye Bye Birdie" and "West Side Story."

Reading again became popular with such books as "The Caine Mutiny", "Peyton Place", "Catcher in the Rye" and "From Here to Eternity." Also "The Power of Positive Thinking" by Norman Vincent Peale, "The Status Seekers" by Vance Packard, and "The Sea" by Rachael Carson.

On T.V. the guns opened fire with "Gunsmoke", "Paladin", "Have Gun Will Travel", "Wagon Train" etc. "I Love Lucy" was one of the most popular shows ever shown on T.V. Also popular were the situation comedies such as "The Honeymooners", "Dobie Gillis", "Ozzie and Harriet", "Father Knows Best", "Our Miss Brooks", "December Bride" and "Burns and Allen Show." And we must not forget the T.V. cops, Sergeant Friday and his partner, Sam Smith, in "Dragnet." Remember?

In the early 50's, the moving van became evidence of progress as people moved by millions to the suburbs and suburbia became a new way of life. By the end of the 50's the suburbs were becoming so crowded and citified that already people were buying camping equipment to escape to the wilderness.

The 50's was a period of great change for Fair Oaks Village and the Thursday Club.

Here is Mae Kelly to tell you about this period in Fair Oaks history.

THE 50's

Mae Kelly

In the early 1950's, there were big changes taking place in our Town. Fair Oaks had been a complete, self-sufficient town. There were many independent stores and shops owned and operated by local people. When thinking back to that time, I question if all of the changes were for the better. Although it was possible to shop out of town, if desired, we had everything necessary for a good life here. We had ladies' dress shops, men's shops, drug store, 2 variety stores, automobile agencies, hardware store, 2 or 3 independent grocery stores, doctors, dentist, bank, theatre, newspaper, etc. No metropolis, but a nice small town. We settled in Fair Oaks in 1943 because we liked what we saw and thought it would be a nice place to live and still think so. We had the privilege of locating anywhere in Northern California but chose to live here. Fair Oaks had its share of eccentric characters, as do all small towns.

When I heard of a possible opening at the local bank, and having had some previous banking experience, I applied and was hired. That proved what a small town Fair Oaks really was. For several years The First National Bank of Fair Oaks, a home-owned independent bank, was the only one for nine miles in all directions. I naturally think of all the changes that transpired there. In the fall of 1951, they started to tear down the building on the corner where the irrigation office is now (10148 Fair Oaks Blvd.). The building had been occupied by Stark's Pharmacy for several years prior to the establishment of the bank. There had been a bank there but a severe freeze and depression in the 30's had caused its failure. During the rebuilding, the bank functioned in what is now a beauty salon between the Community Club and the Plaza. The old vault and Safe Deposit Boxes were maintained at the previous location and the building was being constructed around it. To get to the vault, it was necessary to walk a plank. When raining, it was as though the vault was surrounded by a moat. A lone guard was on duty day and night and one bank employee during banking hours.

In 1956, Dr. David Applegate purchased the building on California Avenue (7988 California Ave.) across from the plaza where his office is now located. The original building on this site was a two-story wooden building which housed the Slocum and Gore General Store. Dr. Bramhall had his office upstairs.

On July 1, 1908, John Holst took over the store and it became known

as Holst and Company. On August 23, 1909, a midnight fire destroyed the building. It was later replaced by a block building which eventually housed Kellam's Hardware which later moved to Fair Oaks Blvd. where Nardinelli's Oaks Hardware is now located (10136 Fair Oaks Blvd.). After Kellam's moved, the present Applegate Building was occupied by Callaghan's Department Store until it moved next to Stark's Pharmacy where Fair Oaks Fabric is now located.

In the section of the Applegate Building which houses the Cooper-Abels Insurance, the original safe which survived the 1909 fire, still stands.

Dr. Clinton Simpson and the Fair Oaks Pharmacy occupied the property before Dr. Applegate purchased it. During the late 60's and the first half of the 70's, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Pontius were the proprietors of a very attractive gift shop, "The Village Green," where Cooper-Abels are located.

Of historical interest is a 1909 Calendar Plate hanging in Dr. Applegate's office. It was originally given to a customer of John Holst and Company and was found hanging on the wall of a home in Gardena by a friend of Dr. Applegate's mother. Recognizing where it had come from, she brought it back to Dr. Applegate and it is now in its original home.

July 1952, the Presbyterian Church was established at its present location on Fair Oaks Boulevard. Prior to that time, there was a Federated Church located at the corner where The Crocker Bank now stands (10030 Fair Oaks Blvd.). The Federated Church had operated jointly with both Methodist and Presbyterian pastors, serving alternately. As the town grew and population increased, I believe, it was felt necessary to have the two separate churches to give them an opportunity to expand. The Methodist Church was established about the same time on Fair Oaks Boulevard where it now is located.

North Ridge Country Club was incorporated in 1952 and the clubhouse was built in 1954. About the same time, Raley's Shopping Center was established on San Juan Avenue. That was about the first development in Fair Oaks outside of the downtown village area.

The Nimbus Dam, completed in 1955, was a great deterrent to flooding conditions experienced from time to time between Fair Oaks and Sacramento.

When Aerojet was built and employees moved into the area in 1955, there was quite a change. Many of the residents thought of Fair Oaks as a Hick Town. Just yesterday, I heard two ladies talking and one describing a town somewhere said, "It is a one-horse town like Fair Oaks." New residents came to Aerojet from far and wide and I feel fairly certain many of those residents recruited then would not, now, want to leave. Maybe some

of the residents resented the influx but those who came then and have stayed, now call it home.

Each Friday, the bank building was wall to wall with people. One of my duties at that time, was to open new accounts and among the routine questions asked of prospective depositors was "Where are you employed?" The reply I often heard, that made my hair stand on end, was "Aerojet, Where else?" It wasn't what was said as much as the way it was said.

Many of you here today were here then, but for others, can you visualize no Sunrise Boulevard and no bridge other than the two-lane bridge that is now closed to vehicles? Starting in 1955, it was realized there had to be access across the river and a means for traffic to fan out. The new bridge was built and rights of way along what is now Sunrise Boulevard were purchased by the county to establish the road. Thirty feet of the rear of the property at our home was included but we were glad it wasn't more.

It seemed there was a new filling station on every corner.

During this period, American River Junior College was established. The campus was to be completed and moved into in the summer of '58.

It really is difficult to remember how it was before all of this happened. Fair Oaks Village, as it is now called, is completely changed. About all that is left of the original shops and stores are the Hardware Store. Everett bought in 1956, Stark's Drug Store, Charles Kanoff purchased in 1959; the Post Office, though the location has been moved; bars and one grocery store. Maybe there are one or two other stores I have overlooked. Of course, approximately 17 years have elapsed since 1959. Do you wonder what the next 15 years will bring? As stated in my opening, referring to serial movies of yesteryear, tune in next month and hear what our ongoing serial has to tell you.

During the 1950's, great and rapid changes were made in the Woman's Thursday Club. In the early 50's, the Club was still located in the original Club House, where The Union Oil Company filling station now stands on the south-east corner of Fair Oaks Blvd. and Sunrise Blvd (10000 Fair Oaks Blvd.). According to the records, The Thursday Club was in somewhat of a financial dilemma. There were many repairs needed on the building and several meetings were held to try to determine the best way to solve the problem. In October 1952, the Club received a 50-year award at the District meeting. It was their golden anniversary and the award was a gold ribbon with a blue 50 pin attached to it, presented by the Northern District President. In January 1953, a pioneer tea was held to celebrate the Club's golden anniversary. Many of the citizens who had been in residence a long time were honored. There were at least 31 of the pioneers in attendance and

over 200 residents present to join in the celebration,

When reading the records, it seemed to me the greatest contribution Club members made to the community, in general, was support of the Blood Bank. Many members donated blood and there were at least 14 repeat donors.

Mrs. Orla Gerhardt was Drama Chairman for the Club and with the support and assistance of Club members, several home-talent shows were presented. They apparently were well received and proved to be good ways and means projects. 50 cents to \$1.00 was the going price for admission, with or without refreshments. The Clubhouse was a great deal larger than the present one and the main room also had a stage. It was really quite nice. Still with all their efforts, finances were in a bad condition. Many cultural programs were presented, musical programs, speakers, and book reviews, to name a few.

In February 1953, the County Fire Marshal inspected the building and recommended necessary repairs to make the building safe for public meetings, doors, exits, etc. with an estimate of about \$526.00 for the necessary repairs. The Club had no choice under those circumstances. About the same time, a special meeting was held to try to decide what to do with the Clubhouse. It needed many repairs - a new roof, complete new plumbing system, and other related repairs, amounting to more than \$800.00 additional that the Club did not have.

In October that year, the Club had in all their funds a balance of \$299.15. Some thought they might resign from General Federation, but that would only have been a drop in the bucket. However, they found they could not do that unless they withdrew from all Federated activities, which they did not wish to do. At this time, the members also considered sale of the property but delayed that decision and agreed to try to raise money to retire the debt. The Rotary Club was approached and asked if they would be interested in buying or leasing the building, but they would have none of it.

The following April 1954, when Mrs. McCormick was President, after a special meeting with County representatives a motion was made to give the Board of Directors permission to sell the Clubhouse, if it became necessary. The motion passed and a committee was appointed to investigate the sale.

In August 1954, an option was given to The Union Oil Company for 90 days for \$24,500.00 - \$250.00 down - option to expire November 2 with 5% commission to be paid by the Club. I imagine that seemed like riches to a group who had struggled for existence. The option was picked up, and The Union Oil Company made a surprise gift of the lumber in the building

to the Methodist Church in March 1955 if they would dismantle the building and clear it away in 30 days. The members of the church worked long and hard and accomplished what seemed almost an impossible task.

The next step for the Thursday Club was to locate a new home and several locations were considered. Finally, a committee was appointed to investigate the possibility of purchasing the chapel. They were authorized to take an option for \$7,500.00 on "This is the Chapel." (Present Clubhouse) It was originally built for after-school activities and religious training, sponsored by the Presbyterian Church when they moved to their present location on Fair Oaks Boulevard. Of course, considerable remodeling was necessary to make the building suitable for a clubhouse.

The first meeting in this location was March 10, 1955. An interesting sidelight is that at that first meeting Lillian Webb was program chairman and Ailene Tropper, Agnes Farnham and Jean Lake were the hostesses for the day. We are happy that three of them are still active members.

At the next meeting in April 1955, the contents of the Corner Stone, laid originally at the original Club House in 1913, were examined and placed on display. Special guests for the occasion were Mrs. Horace Massey, Past President; Mrs. John Holst, Life Member; and Mrs. Bramhall, a charter member.

Blue prints and permits were to be obtained and grading was to be done as well as burning weeds about the building. All of this had to be accomplished before remodeling could be done. They must have been busy times for the members. It was decided the Garden Section would be responsible for landscaping the grounds. A dining room was to be added in the near future and additional parking arranged for. In January 1956, a contract had been signed with Mr. Thomas Jones. All through the year, all of the problems, specifications and options were worked on for remodeling.

In March 1956, one year later, the work was completed and Mr. Jones and the Committee were thanked and excused. Of the \$24,500.00, after commission, purchase of new facilities, repairs and purchases of furniture and equipment were paid, about \$11,400.00 remained. It doesn't take as long to spend it as to accumulate it. Several suggestions were made and considered by the Club members for a donation for a worthy project. There were evidently some level heads present as I read someone suggested they wait until they learned just how they stood after repairs were made and bills paid. A scholarship open to the public, a donation for lights at McArthur Athletic Field at San Juan High, donation to support a swimming pool project in Fair Oaks, and many other projects were considered. A motion was made to donate \$25.00 to McArthur Fund, and in October 1957, a

student loan revolving fund of \$50.00 was established at American River Junior College as a memorium to Bill Andrews, Jr., a local young man killed in a hunting accident. This fund was to be open to public contribution, but by December of the same year, the funds were depleted.

In 1956 through 1958, when Mrs. Tropper was president, the club members were divided into groups and a series of foreign luncheons were held. Hostesses dressed in costumes and each group furnished the food, symbolic of the country represented, for their particular luncheon. A charge of \$1.00 was made and they were exceptionally well received. Open to the public, the word soon got around with other clubs and various groups took advantage of the luncheons. They occasionally ran pretty close to a shortage as reservations were requested, but as you all know that doesn't always work.

At a March 12, 1959 meeting, two years after the purchase of the new Clubhouse, the report of a committee previously appointed to investigate the purchase of the property at the rear of the Clubhouse was read: "After serious consideration it is recommended to buy .0058 acres adjoining the back of our property to protect the initial investment and for additional parking." The President recommended a vote be taken and called a special meeting March 26, 1959. Ballots were mailed to all members. The recommendation failed to pass as a 2/3 majority of all the membership was required for passing. \$2,500.00 was asked and considered reasonable.

In 1957 and 1958, many hours of volunteer time were spent at the DeWitt Hospital by the members. During the seven-month period, 381 hours were donated and food, cigarettes and gifts valued at \$373.15 were also donated.

When Mrs. John Billington became President from 1958-1960, the members had more or less settled down to their usual routine with thoughts of service, friendship and culture for themselves and the community.

All through the 50's there was decided change in The Thursday Club. However, it was then, and has always enjoyed a place of distinction in the community. From the time it was organized in 1902, it has been synonymous with the best in Social Life.

At the end of the 50's there was a membership of 78.

We have had some definitely outstanding women among our membership through the years. Don't lose sight of that fact when considering The Woman's Thursday Club of Fair Oaks.