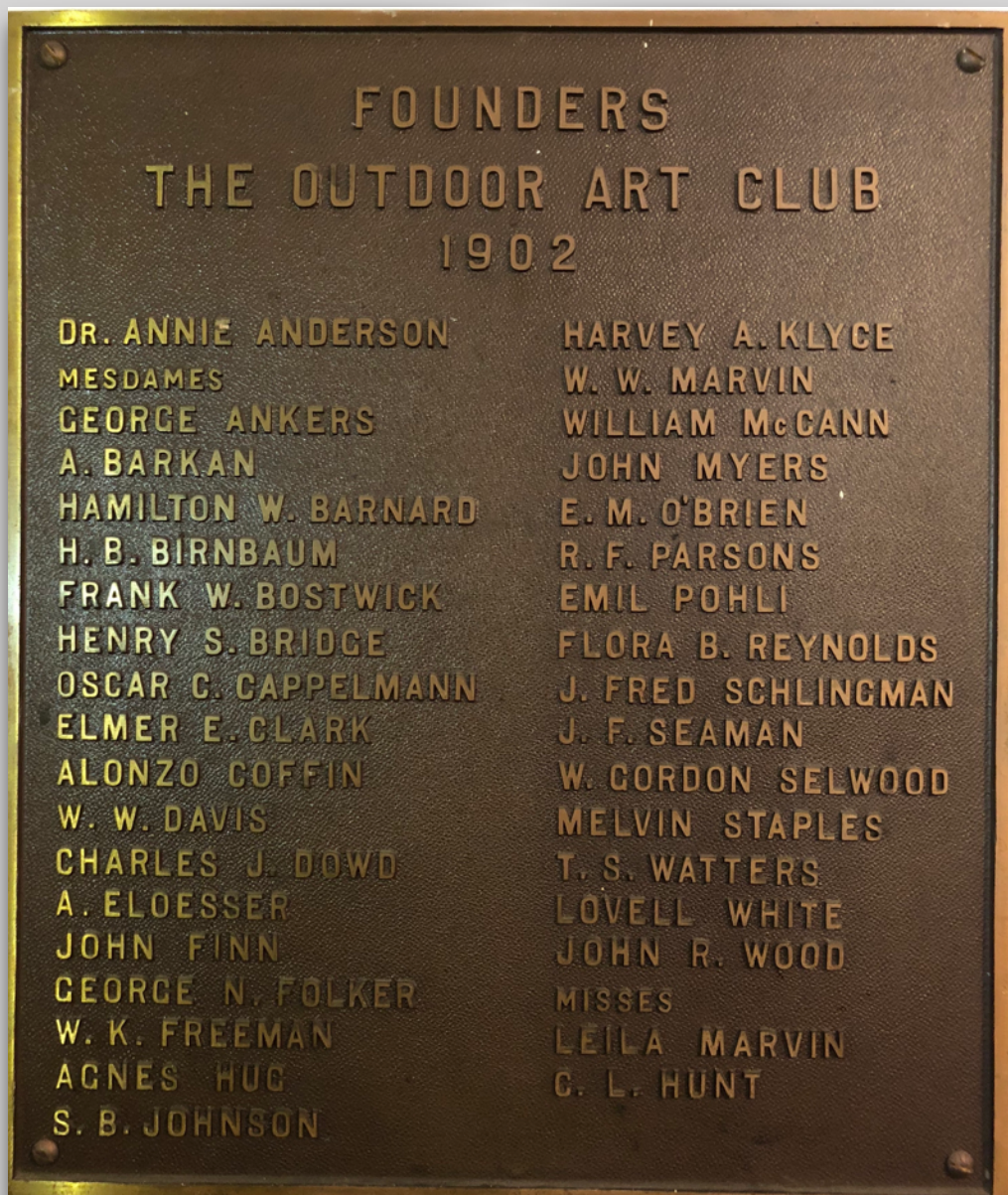


## **NOW TO THE WEBSITE . . . . . THE OAC SERIAL!!**

Beginning in March 2018, the amazing and unfolding results of the query Melissa Kurtz and Lynda Chittenden asked when looking at the brass plaque in our foyer.

Thus began The 35 Ladies Project!

### **WHO WERE THESE WOMEN WHO, IN 1902, FOUNDED The Outdoor Art Club?**



**Researcher: Melissa Kurtz**

**Writer: Lynda Chittenden**



## WHO WERE THE WOMEN WHO FOUNDED The Outdoor Art Club?



At the beginning of this project, we knew little more than the information contained on the brass plaque in our foyer: a list of 35 women, 30 of whom were “*Mesdames*” with no individual identity other than their husband’s initials and surnames. We do see three given names, one a physician, but it wasn’t until we started researching that we discovered the other two first names were only listed that way because they belonged to widows. But searches into numerous sources from our own OAC archives to the vast Internet have revealed a collection of remarkable, admirable women. Barry Spitz’s book, *Mill Valley, the Early Years*, describes the Founders of The Outdoor Art Club as “*among the town’s most prominent in social,*

*civic, charitable, business and artistic affairs*,” and then he lists them. But again, here the reader knows only the first name of three women, plus the initials and surnames of the two who were “*Misses*”. We know the rest of the women only by a list of their husbands’ surnames prefaced by the generic “*Mrs.*”

So, who were the women, led by Laura Lyon White, who gathered on August 2, 1902 to found a women’s club stating as its purpose “*...to preserve the natural scenery of Mill Valley and of the surrounding country, to beautify the grounds around public buildings, to endeavor to create public sentiment against the wanton destruction of birds and game...as well engage in what is known as civic, social and literary work...?*”



*The* above photograph shows women, eleven of whom are corsage-wearing Founders, who dressed up for the 1904 celebration of their newly completed Clubhouse knowing they would have their picture taken that day. However, contradicting current fashion, not one lady’s hat sprouts an egret plume or feathers from a dead bird. These ladies lived their conservation values. While a few of the women could legitimately be classified as relatively wealthy patricians, as a group they were not concerned with maintaining lofty positions in society. The 35 signers of the original membership roll stated that the major qualifications for *membership* were “*character and intelligence, without regard for religion or politics.*”

We have realized it is helpful to also think about the place, named Mill Valley in 1900, that these women so valued. A railroad enabled access to areas of spectacular natural beauty at a time when hiking was the most popular form of exercise. Areas in both Blithedale and Cascade Canyon were home to popular camping sites and tourist hotels. Obviously logging had already taken place as the mill giving the town its name was built before the gold rush. However, abundantly available were both sunny and wooded lots, near and up from creeks running full all year. By the 1890s, the Tamalpais Land & Water Company owned the land around the valley of the mill, and they had plans to develop it. Spitz says, *"The grandest event in the history of Mill Valley was the lot auction that took place on Saturday, May 31, 1890. Shortly before the auction, there were fewer than ten homes scattered across all of today's Mill Valley. At the auction, more than 200 lots were sold and construction on many began soon after."*

Some of our Founders were among those first people to settle in the new town, e.g. George and Alice Folker, Elizabeth McCann, and Frank and Isabel Bostwick purchased lots at the 1890 auction. Laura and Lovell White built their summerhouse, *The Arches*, in 1891. By 1902, many were full time residents of the town, e.g. Agnes Cappleman, Louise Coffin, Emma Dowd, and Mary Marvin. Others were only summer visitors with their primary residences still being in San Francisco, e.g. Laura White, Molly Eloesser, Carrie Hunt and Kate Pohli.

Most of the 35 Founders were married women, and considered themselves as being from *"good marriages."* However. Dr. Anne Anderson and Carrie Hunt were life-long spinsters; the one other *"Miss"* was Leila Marvin, the 20-year old daughter of Mary Marvin. And, not every woman was loath to divorce. Federal census records list Laura Barnard and Alice Folker as having divorced at some point after 1902. While two were spinsters and some childless, most were mothers. In 1902, the OAC Founders had collectively given birth to over 66 children.

Some of the women were immigrants, mostly from Europe, e.g. Alice Folker, Agnes Hug, Bessie Selwood and Kate Pohli. Three others were born in exotic locales, perhaps to parents on their way to the U.S.A., i.e. Louise Coffin in Mexico City, Dr. Annie Anderson in Hong Kong, and Elizabeth McCann in Australia. Some were born in the midwest or east coast of the US, e.g. Flora Davis, Carrie Seaman, Eva Finn and Ellen O'Brien. However, at least 13 of the 35 OAC Founders were native-born Northern Californians, e.g. Agnes Cappleman, Carrie Bridge, Carrie Klyce, Charlotte Ankers, Rose Schlingman, Leila Marvin, Ella Freeman, Ada Wood, Flora Reynolds, Molly Eloesser, Mariette Watters, Isabel Bostwick. Furthermore, Emma Dowd was actually born in Marin, her parents having come to California soon after the Gold Rush. We believe all of these women can be seen as pioneers—plucky, determined, quite aware of opportunities in the West not available to women in the East. Most of our Founders were wives and mothers, but they also saw themselves as competently able to shape the community being created.

While in 1902 only one of the 35 women, Carrie Hunt, was working full time as a school-teacher, some had either been educated as teachers, e.g. Carrie Klyce, or in later years taught school locally, i.e. Carrie Seaman and Ella Freeman. Most of the women in 1902 did not work outside the home, although Emma Dowd was a full partner in her husband's business, Carrie Bridge speculated in land sales, Annie Anderson practiced medicine in Mill Valley, and Flora Reynolds was the town's postmistress for twenty years, from 1905 to 1925.

The ladies who founded The Outdoor Art Club were, we suspect, fervent supporters of temperance. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, progressive politics meant not only a belief in preserving especially beautiful outdoor spaces, but also a conviction that saloons were evil due to their deleterious impact on communities. In 1900, the husbands of Louise Coffin, Carrie Klyce, Laura Barnard, and Rose Schlingman were part of a group of prominent citizens who wanted to keep the town dry. They founded a new newspaper, *The Mill Valley Record*, to compete with the existing *Marin County Enterprise*, which did print some local news, but it mainly proselytized against the town's restrictive liquor laws and was distributed mostly in the town's many illegal saloons.



Today with our liberated voice, we ask, "Who were these women?" wanting to know more about them than just their husbands' surnames. After discovering details about individual women, we also know as a group they were ladies in the full sense of the word, e.g. in 1908, the Mill Valley Record reported that at Club expense and for public use *"...two properly labeled toilets were installed at the train depot,"* replacing what had previously been *"...far from the right thing,"* meaning a single toilet both men and women were expected to use.

Looking carefully at the picture of these ladies proudly gathered in front of their newly completed, Bernard Maybeck-designed Clubhouse, one cannot help but reflect on their efforts to get dressed up that November morning in 1904. They wanted to look their very best for the photograph they knew would later be taken.



Beulah Barber, **Mary L. Marvin**, **Isabel Bostwick**, Mary Eliza House, **Laura Lyon White**, **Elizabeth MacCann**, **Lorena Martin**, **Alice Folker**, **Flora Reynolds**, Mary Folger, **Lida Staples**, **Carrie Klyce**, **Carrie Bridge**, **Eva Ann Finn** (*Bolded names are those of OAC Founders.*)

We assume their homes had running water and that corsets were involved, but not stringently so. Beauty salons, good hair cuts and modern hair products were not available to them, thus it took time and effort to deal with long hair every morning. We assume most of their dresses had been hand-stitched or perhaps sewn on a Singer treadle-machine. And we know these garments were not made from modern fabrics, thus each dress had to have

been carefully ironed, and not with an electric one! On that November morning, these women took the time to add a bit of lace, find and put on gloves, put their best hats on carefully coiffed hair, pin on corsages, carry parasols and their best beaded purses. Photography at that time took long minutes, not seconds, to snap . . . but determined looks were maintained. These ladies were not to be trifled with.

This introduction to The OAC Serial, The 35 Ladies Project, gives you only a general idea of who the Founders of The Outdoor Art Club were as a group. In installments to follow will be biographical sketches about those individual women for whom we have been able to know from Internet research as well from deep dives into our archives. As we continue our research, some pieces will be considered rather complete; others should be seen as works in progress.

In the next installment, you will meet a woman who was not a patrician or even a permanent resident of Mill Valley and who we initially knew only by her initials, C. L. Hunt, the last woman listed on the brass plaque. Be prepared to be knocked out and proud of Caroline Loring Hunt.