

The OAC Serial, "The 35 Ladies Project" continues . . .

Isabelle Bostwick

(1864 – 1941)

(Mrs. Frank Bostwick)

Pictured here in 1904, Isabelle F. Stewart was definitely one of Mill Valley's prominent residents in the early 20th Century. We don't know much about her early life other than she was born in San Francisco in 1864 to a father whose occupation in the 1870 census was described as being a "real estate broker," no doubt a lucrative occupation in San Francisco in those post gold-rush years. In 1888 when she was 24 years old, Isabelle married Frank W. Bostwick, newly arrived from Michigan who had banking in his future.



The couple soon relocated to Marin. At the 1890 auction they purchased a large parcel of land between Lovell and Tamalpais Avenues. In his Mill Valley book, Spitz reports daughter-in-law Helen Bostwick saying, "*They chose this property because they knew the cows from the Throckmorton Ranch used to come down here to sleep, so it was the warmest place in the valley.*" The area was called Primrose Hill, and was laced with cow paths. Later, the upper section of the property was dubbed Bostwick's Hill. The Bostwicks pitched a tent on the property until a small, wooden frame home was ready in 1891. In 1897, the home was significantly enlarged by Harvey Klyce as contractor. Adjacent parcels were added." In addition to enlarging their home, in 1897 the Bostwicks were one of the first local residences to have their own telephone. The Bostwick family home, Blink Bonnie, still stands at #45 Cornelia Avenue.

During the time they lived in that tent on their newly purchased property, Isabel was pregnant. Spitz says their "*small, wooded frame home (was) ready in 1891*". While their modest cottage was being readied, the baby was also getting ready. Son Steward was born in September of 1891, daughter Janet was born four years later. Census records say both children were born in San Francisco presumably because Isabelle and Frank wanted their children to be born in a hospital. One can imagine imminent birth necessitating anxious ferryboat trips across the bay, or perhaps they relocated to the city a few days or weeks beforehand.

Both Isabelle and Frank were early community leaders. In the original 1900 election to choose the first group of Town Trustees, Frank was the highest vote getter and therefore served as Mill Valley's first mayor. He later founded the Bank of Mill Valley, of which he was president until it was absorbed by the Bank of America. In 1913, he became one of the principals in the syndicate that owned the Mt. Tamalpais & Muir Woods Railway.

In 1902 Isabelle was 38 years old, with two children, but she did not hesitate to join with some of her neighbors in forming a women's club. Nor did she hesitate to assume a leadership role. In the first OAC election, Isabelle was chosen as the first Vice-President, serving alongside Flora Davis. In Agnes Cappleman's beautiful penmanship, the minutes from that first August 2 meeting record, "*a motion was made and carried that we form an association or Club to be known as The Outdoor Art Club.*" A century plus later, it is important we remember that then the term "*outdoor art*" had nothing to do with garden sculptures. In the late 1890s and early 1900s, the Outdoor Art Movement advocated the civic value of creating and preserving special outdoor spaces.

Isabelle wrote about the beginnings of The Outdoor Art Club in a 1915 article published in the Mill Valley Record: *"The early settlers of Mill Valley remember the railroad station set in the midst of tall redwoods and oaks. One morning the townspeople were startled by the ring of the woodsman's axe and the crash of falling trees, and in an hour or two our splendid trees were laid low. There was great indignation, especially among the women who love the trees and believe that improvements often can be made in such ways that they can still be spared. The question at once arose, 'How can this be stopped? Who has the right to protest and to whom shall protests be made?'* Realizing that in union there is strength, an appeal was made to Mrs. Lovell White, who through her many years of experience in club work might well advise what to do."

Isabelle goes on to describe early organizing meetings and quotes the Club's purpose which was included in the first bylaws: *"The purpose of this Association shall be 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, and in all other directions to encourage the development of Outdoor Art, as well as to engage in what is known as civic, social and literary work."*

In her Mill Valley Record article, Isabelle goes on to describe the building of a clubhouse: *"On August 4th, 1904, on the second anniversary of the Club, the cornerstone of a Clubhouse was laid, and in November of the same year, the members were welcomed into their new home, where much of the social life of Mill Valley has since centered."* In the article, Isabelle also describes two early OAC achievements:



"The Club began (in 1902) the work of beautifying the school house grounds where it persevered through several years in spite of most discouraging conditions – grading, building stone bulkheads, planting shrubs and trees, etc. This work cost between five and six hundred dollars. (The OAC raised the monies to do this at the same time they were raising the needed funds to build their Clubhouse.) She also goes on to describe one of the Outdoor Art Club's most famous early accomplishment: "During the third year of the Club's existence, Mill Valley was visited by a pest of caterpillars and though the Club members were astounded at the magnitude of the task, they set to work to try to exterminate these obnoxious and destructive creatures, enlisting the school children who were paid ten cents a quart for the caterpillars. They were brought to the Club in such quantities that it nearly 'swamped' the treasury but it fairly well cleaned the Valley of caterpillars and served as a great advertisement, newspapers all over the country commenting on the methods used by The Outdoor Art Club."

In the OAC's 1916 production of *"Shakespeare Redivivus"*, Isabelle played the role of Lady Mcbeth. We choose to believe she chose that role not because it fit her character, but because it was an important part of the play, just as she was an important club member. Isabelle died in Mill Valley in November of 1941 at age 77, two years after the death of husband Frank at age 79. They had been married over fifty years.

In the next installment of the OAC Serial, **"The 35 Ladies Project"**, you will read about the most beloved of the OAC Founders.