

Mary Elizabeth Darling
by Isabelle Nelson

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Mary Darling was a woman who had great influence in the development of Riverside in its early years—an influence which is still being felt in the strong leadership of women and their organizations in the City and County. From pictures in *The Press*, she seems to have had rather delicate features, to be fair-haired, and to be small of stature. She was an intelligent lady with a great interest in cultural affairs and in civic improvements. She was a skillful organizer and had strong leadership capabilities. John Raymond Gabbert wrote that "she was known for her ability, kindly nature and gracious manner and was held in high esteem".

Mary Elizabeth Foster was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, on 18 May 1852. Lorenzo F. Darling was born in Baldwin, Maine. He was educated for teaching and taught school. He studied law then turned to commercial interests. For several years he conducted a wholesale jewelry business in Halifax.

In 1876, he married Mary Elizabeth Foster in Halifax. Soon after, they came to the United States and Mary became a citizen. In the early 1880s Lorenzo had some health problems and they came to Riverside for the winter of 1886, staying at the Glenwood Tavern. They probably came across country by train, getting off at Colton where they were met by the Glenwood's horse-drawn carriage and driven to Riverside.

The developing orange culture appealed to Lorenzo and he bought 10 acres of land. \$1,000 for 10 acres was the going rate. He commissioned a home to be built on the property by Davis and Porter. Mary and Lorenzo returned to the East and closed out their affairs.

Two years later, in 1888, they returned to Riverside to take up residence in their newly completed home. From a picture, it had two stories and an attic. It had a wide porch across the front and along one side, with small balconies of the second-floor rooms. It became a hospitable meeting place for friends, neighbors, and newcomers.

One wonders how a young couple, from the East, who had never done really hard work could manage 10 acres of citrus and run a large house. The answer was with the cheap and available Chinese laborers. House servants could be hired for wages of \$16 to \$25 monthly. Chinese men had first come to California by shiploads in the Gold Rush days. They stayed to do farm and domestic work.

Then when the trans-continental railroad was built in the 1860s, thousands more Chinese laborers were imported. With the rail lines mostly completed in the 1870s, the Chinese settled in the newly developing communities and were available for agriculture and domestic work at low wages. The Chinese men left their families in China and would send money home or save for the time when they could return. The men were hard workers and intelligent enough to be easily trained for new tasks. Many were very good agricultural workers as they had done that work in the old country. They performed most of the hard labor involved in the rapid expansion of the citrus plantings from 1880 to 1900. The ones who could not do the hard labor made good domestic help.

With the domestic chores taken care of, Mary and fifteen of her new neighbor ladies began to get together twice a month in their new big homes for socializing, fancy work, pattern and plant exchanges, and book discussions. In 1890, Mary took a trip to Boston where she attended some Federated Women's Club meetings. She returned with glowing reports of what organized women's clubs could accomplish. She organized her group of neighbors into a real club, naming it the Sorocco Club and writing by-laws for it. She became its president. About that time the City Council granted a franchise to Frank Miller, master of the Glenwood Inn, for mule-driven street car service down the center of old Magnolia Avenue. The ladies were outraged because it was an offense against the artistic beauty of the famed double drive. The road was divided with beautiful park plantings and trees in the center divider. It was noted for its beauty and was an attraction for visitors. It had been laid out in 1875 by Sayward and Evans and had started the cycle of divided avenues in Southern California and elsewhere.

Frank Miller, who was to run the street car system, told the ladies that he was building little Spanish design waiting stations along the route. He suggested the club could build a stucco station for the fresh teams of mules to be housed at the head of Magnolia Avenue, which was the Arlington Avenue intersection. He would have the Glenwood architect draw up the plans. The cost to build would be \$300. The club signed the agreement and began to raise the money. Whist and garden parties were organized. One such affair made \$75.00 and the Darlings had a garden supper party which brought in \$90.00. These large amounts pleased the ladies. The waiting stations were built and used for almost 50 years.

In 1896, Dr. Sarah Maloy, a newcomer to Riverside, assembled women, Mary being one, in her office to form a Riverside Woman's Club as an enjoyable addition to social life of the City. Mary became leader of the art department of the new club and held that position for two years. The next year she became Secretary. In 1899, she became President of the Riverside Woman's Club.

One of her first acts was to appoint a committee of five, including herself, to contact Andrew Carnegie to procure a grant to erect a public library for the City, which would include a Woman's Club room. The committee was also to raise funds from local citizens and the City to buy the necessary property. Finally, the committee was to work with the City trustees to plan and construct a suitable building for a public library, with an apartment on the upper level for permanent occupancy of the Woman's Club.

The Riverside Woman's Club proposal was denied. The same proposal with male sponsorship was accepted.

In 1898, Mary helped organize an Emergency Relief Association to send comfort and necessities to Company M, at the border, when there was need. This was a military company of local men training for their possible service in the Spanish-American War, which the United States was then fighting. The Emergency Relief Association was a viable organization of local men and women for 18 years, and became the recognized medium for patriotic relief service in the community. The same year, a local Red Cross Chapter was formed with Mary as First Vice President. They sewed for the soldiers in Company M. Later, about 1911, the Emergency Relief Association merged with the Red Cross.

As President of the Riverside Woman's Club, Mary encouraged interest in schools, educational advancement, and the public library. She fostered a taste for the best in reading.

She also supported the arts and advancing knowledge and appreciation of good music. She had a strong interest in civic affairs and public improvements. She urged citizens to keep the city clean and attractive.

In 1900, the Club organized the first of many successful street fairs. The whole community took part in these fairs with exhibits of citrus and other agriculture products, flowers, arts and crafts, and other interests.

Mary's concept of club life was first of all self-culture, followed by culture of neighbor and friendly service to the community. She thought that nothing could be accomplished by going off on tangents. Only collaboration got things done.

In 1900, the California Federation of Women's Clubs was organized in Los Angeles. Mary was there representing The Sorocco Club of Riverside. In 1902, the first State convention was held in San Francisco. At that convention, Mary was elected President of the Southern district.

When she returned home she consulted with some of her liberal minded associates and they organized the Extemporaneous Drill Club. They met every Wednesday morning in the Universalist Church. Soon after, the name was changed to the day they met: The Wednesday Club. The purpose of this club was to help members with parliamentary procedure and extemporaneous speaking. The aim was to know how to preside and debate. They had men of the community and prominent speakers as guests at their meetings.

One early guest was attorney John G. North, the son of Riverside's founder, John W. North. His remarks regarded the progress made in the condition of women as a large measure of civilization. He thought that women's position had improved and strengthened because of the growing sense in men of the injustice of

women's position.

The women of the Wednesday Club also learned how they could influence legislation from a talk by State Senator Caldwell. Other matters considered by speakers included the property rights of women, and finances, especially learning how to write checks. Discussions were also held on public schools, women in history as mothers, and women in journalism led by E. P. Clark, the editor of The Press. They also visited the newly completed Sherman Institute, a boarding school for Indian students in Riverside.

By 1901, word had been received that Andrew Carnegie would give the City funds to be used for a library building. Under discussion was the location. The ladies of the Woman's Club favored a White Park site, but the City trustees decided on the 7th Street location between Orange and Lemon streets. Perhaps Frank Miller exerted his considerable influence for that location across Orange Street from the Glenwood. The library was completed by 1902 in the then-popular Mission Revival style.

In 1902, Mary presided over the first Southern District convention in Santa Ana. There were eighteen clubs represented. In 1903, she attended the second State convention in Fresno and was elected State President of California Federation of Women's Clubs.

1903 found the Riverside Woman's Club planning a decorated carriage procession through Riverside in honor of President William H. Taft, who was to visit the city. Mary was certainly busy in this project. There were other nationally known guests in the city at that time and Mary helped entertain most. Some guests were received in cars instead of carriages. The New Glenwood was opened and Mary was one of the hostesses for this gala event. She also did some of her entertaining there.

Mary met with representatives of the Men's Present-Day Club to discuss the route of the proposed Huntington trolley line from Pasadena. The Wednesday Club brought together men and women to form a Historical Society for the city. Many of the early settlers attended. Mary presided and presented the proposed objectives of this group. They should collect and preserve all material having any bearing on the history of Riverside and have discussions about the material. John G. North was elected first president.

1904 found Mary presiding over the third annual State Federation of Woman's Clubs. The convention was held at the State Capitol building in Sacramento. Governor Pardee was the principal speaker. As State President, Mary took great interest in support for forestry in the Northern part of the State. She was also interested in statewide irrigation. Later that year Mary was hostess for Governor Pardee when he visited Riverside.

The Riverside Woman's Club of this period was involved in city improvement and beautification, encouraging weed control and tree planting by citizens. They petitioned the City Council to plant palms on Main Street between 7th and 14th. They supported traveling libraries and two were sent out. They pushed for curfew for juveniles and for passage of the Juvenile Court Bill.

Mary, now in her 50s, must have been ready to slow down a bit and let others take the leadership role. She must have been proud of what she and the women's clubs had accomplished because she had, through these busy years, compiled scrapbooks from articles in The Press and mementos of meetings. (These scrapbooks now are in the Riverside Local History Resource Centre at the Riverside Public Library. ed.)

About 1900, Mary began writing club news for The Press. Sometimes she would write long articles with headings such as "Happy Rambles" or "Mirrors of Yesterday". She discussed such things as beautifying the city through weed control, well-kept lawns, and the planting of flowers as a joy for residents and a magnet for attracting visitors.

She did other writings and organized a small womens writers group which later (1942) affiliated with the National League of Penwomen. She wrote short stories and historical sketches. She published "One Place After Another", a travel story. She outlined the history of the Southern District of the California Women's Clubs. For a Founders Day program she wrote: Founders Day, we all take part to win favor of the Goddess of Art, Drama, Verse, Stories, and Crafts which we do, pledge stronger will to pursue.

By 1912, Mary was organizing another group of all presidents, past and present, of all women's organizations in the County. She proposed that they work for the furtherance of the Arts Center plan. They met at the YWCA and planned an annual meeting at the Glenwood Mission Inn. In 1916, she was helping form the Hispanic Arts Society of California. The object of this group seemed to be collecting art for the Spanish Gallery of the Mission Inn. She became its first director.

Lorenzo's health had been failing, and after forty years of marriage, he died in October 1916. Mary was in her 60s. It was said that he had been a worthy and valued citizen. Mary and Lorenzo were, no doubt, charter members of the Victoria Club, which was started in 1903. Mary's name was mentioned as playing in tournaments. She was also an associate member of the Casa Blanca Lawn Tennis Club. Mary regularly attended All Saints' Episcopal Church.

Some time after Lorenzo's death, Mary took up residence at the Mission Inn and spent the rest of her long life there. The Miller and Hutchings families had always been good friends of hers. Mary was often hostess at social functions at the Inn.

World War I in 1917-1918 found Mary busy sewing for the Red Cross and getting the club ladies to do their bit. In 1920, Mary, as a member of the Riverside Pioneer Historical Society, was part of a committee to petition the City Council to name the new park at the Santa Fe depot, North Park. That site had been the location of the John W. North (one of the city's founders) home. She was also designated by the Historical Society to write the history of Riverside Woman's Club.

In 1926, the Woman's Club organized the Riverside Community Players. Mary, now in her 70s, was less active except for the many activities at the Mission Inn.

In 1943, the Red Cross elected Mary to honorary membership in grateful recognition for her active part in the organization. Mary was 91 years old. In 1942, when the National League of American Pen Women organized a Riverside branch, Mary was a charter member. In 1948, the Wednesday Club honored her as founder, president emeritus, and historian. About this time, at Mary's suggestion, the funds from the Spanish Art Society were donated to the Riverside Allied Arts Planning Association. In 1947, the Mission Inn started a helicopter service to bring guests from Los Angeles. As Mary watched the arrival of these guests by the first helicopters, she was heard to remark, "I first arrived here by covered wagon."

Mary died 20 January 1950 at the age of 98. It was said that the early settler families of Riverside each had a "piano and a buggy." That description probably referred to Mary and Lorenzo and their neighbors.

The women of Riverside City and County owe Mary Darling a debt of gratitude for establishing a place for women as leaders in their civic, cultural, and educational affairs and projects. The Darling property on Arlington Avenue became Shamel Park, and the lovely old Victorian home became the Park Recreation Center. It was for several years used by one of the Woman's Clubs as the Halloween haunted house. The old house was finally destroyed by fire not too many years ago when it was about 100 years old.