

Oral History Committee

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Mill Valley, California

EDNA (MRS. HENRY) FOSTER

An Interview Conducted By

Betsy Andresen and

Lucretia Little

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# EDNA FOSTER

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Mrs. Henry Foster (née Edna Deming)

Born March 18, 1894 in Ashland, Oregon.

Resident of Mill Valley since 1923.

Interviewed May 8, 1974 in her home at  
175 Hillside Avenue, Mill Valley.

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EDNA (MRS. HENRY) FOSTER

Betsy Andresen

These are the spoken recollections of Mrs. Henry Foster, better known as Edna Foster, of 175 Hillside Avenue, Mill Valley, California, on May 8, 1974.

The interviewers are Lucretia Little, Mill Valley Historian, and Betsy Andresen for the Mill Valley Oral History Committee.

Mrs. Foster has lived in Mill Valley for many years and has played a large part in its development.

Edna Foster

I've written out a few early memories and will read them for you if I may:

My introduction to Mill Valley was in September 1912 -- a rushing stunt<sup>1/</sup> up Mount Tamalpais that was supposed to be a happy picnic with warm sunshine and new friends to be made. We came from Berkeley to San Francisco by the Key System train and the ferry. From the San Francisco Ferry Building we took the ferry to Sausalito and the electric train to Mill Valley. The train conductor announced, "Mill Valley Beautiful," and we got off.

We found a Swiss style train depot with beautiful, lacy, wrought-iron braces holding the wide overhang of the second story, the home of the station agent and his family. This was the center of town, with the big Keystone Building across the street. Nearby were Lockwood's Drug Store, a bakery, Allen's Grocery, and a few small cars (mostly Fords) in the park now named Lytton Square.

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<sup>1/</sup> Members of her sorority at University of California, Berkeley, were choosing new members.

I think it might be interesting to note that the early depot<sup>1/</sup> (according to some of the old-timers like Minnie Seymour and Estelle Brand) was really quite a center. People in those days had to go up and down the trails at night by lantern light. The streets were not paved, and most of the places had no sidewalks. People would put on their boots or galoshes and appropriate clothes and come down the trails to the train station, where they would change and put on the clothes they were going to wear to the opera. They could leave their other clothes safely in the station, take the train to San Francisco, and come back late at night to change back into their galoshes, and so forth, and go back up the hill lighted by their lanterns. This is really what they did for a number of years. To me this is quite picturesque.

The town was still young in 1912. It was only in 1890 that they had the auction to sell the first lots.

#### Lucretia Little

The town wasn't incorporated until 1900, so you're talking about a town that was only twelve years old.

#### Mrs. Foster

It was still pretty little when I came along. My grandfather's cousin told me later that he had bought two lots at the auction that Mr. Schlingman<sup>2/</sup> had in 1890. I don't know what two lots they were. His name was Will Crocker. He married my grandfather's cousin's daughter, so he was a cousin by marriage. He loved Mill Valley right from the beginning and enjoyed it when he came over here after that.

At the time he told me the story he was not very well. In fact, he was in St. Francis Hospital. He said he probably should have held onto the lots, but he sold them. Of course we wished he had held onto them. He went on to say, "If Mr. Schlingman had only developed the level part of the land or some of the more gentle slopes, instead of being persistent in developing Ethel Avenue and Molino Avenue, he would not have had such a hard time financially and would have ended up with a much better financial picture."

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<sup>1/</sup>Mary French Seymour, mother of Kent and Elliot.

<sup>2/</sup>John Fred Schlingman.

But back to my little trip up Mount Tamalpais in 1912:

We gathered together our lunches, our sweaters, and so forth, and started up Throckmorton, through the Old Mill Park, and across Cascade Creek up the long steps leading to the Pipeline Trail. Friendly residents offered us a glass of water along the way, and at the top of the steps we bought lemonade. That was in the days before too many hikers came over -- before they became a nuisance. People really liked to have company in those days, to have a chance to chat with people, so they welcomed us as a diversion.

At last the summit was reached and lunches were brought out, even though it was starting to mist a little -- and later to rain. That was when we decided to ride "the crookedest railroad" down the hill, past the Double Bowknot and the Muir Woods turnoff, enjoying a gorgeous panorama of the East Bay, San Francisco, and the near beauty of Mount Tamalpais.

Mrs. Andresen

You climbed to the top in spite of the rain?

Mrs. Foster

Oh yes. We didn't give up.

Mrs. Little

Did they have the gravity cars then?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, there were gravity cars down to Muir Woods at that time, but we rode the regular cars down from the top, past the gravity turnoff to Muir Woods. It was an interesting ride, because the trains were certainly very.... Well, you didn't know for sure whether they were going to be safe or not when you came down that hill with all those turns. But we decided that other people had ridden them so it must be all right for us.

What started out as a gay picnic, a way to get acquainted and to choose new members of the Carnarvon Club (which two years later became Psi Chapter of Alpha Delta Pi) seemed to have had a rather discouraging dampening at the end. But this really was not so -- as time was to



tell. It was a good test of the disposition of the rush-ees. Now, after sixty-one years, several of these girls (you can put quotes around girls) and their families are still among my dearest friends -- thanks to the good chance at the beginning, on the slopes of Mount Tamalpais and the bonds of reunion of our sorority.

During college I belonged to a hiking club. After many hikes to Muir Woods, Stinson Beach, Crystal Springs, and over to Fairfax, a group of us spent a weekend at a cottage up Cascade Canyon -- and later at a house on Oakdale rented by friends of mine. So Mill Valley became more familiar to me.

I taught two years in Fortuna in 1916 and '17, in the beautiful redwood country there. From 1918 to 1921 I taught in Petaluma, after which Henry Foster and I were married. After brief periods in Santa Rosa and Berkeley, we came to Mill Valley on Armistice Day in 1923 to live on Lovell Avenue for seven years. We moved then to our home at 175 Hillside Avenue because we found that when we were living in a house on level ground we always wanted to walk on the hill at night to look at the view.

Henry had said in the beginning, "I work hard all day, and I don't want you to buy a place on top of a hill so I'll have to walk hard up a hill when I get home at night." In those days people did not take their cars down and leave them at the depot to come home in. Your car was left at home in the garage, and you walked home. Of course when we were on Lovell we were just seven blocks from the depot (we were just opposite the Old Mill School), so it wasn't too far.

It's strange how different our habits are now. People will take their cars just a little ways and park downtown. In those days everybody walked. And of course we were younger in those days too!

That's as far as I wrote anything out.

Mrs. Andresen

Where were you born, Edna? In Petaluma?

Mrs. Foster

No, I was born in Ashland, Oregon, the town that has

the natural lithia springs. If you go up there and take some lemon juice along, you can get some natural carbonated lemonade that's very nice. It's also a town with a very good college and, of course, the famous Shakespearean Festival every year. They've recently built, I believe, a permanent theatre. When I was last there they had a stage in an outdoor setting, but that was a long time ago. It's a charming place, with a nice climate.

Mrs. Andresen

Were you raised in Ashland?

Mrs. Foster

No, I lived there only until I was two years old. Then my paternal grandmother died, back in Michigan, so we went back to take care of my grandfather until he died in 1900. We then came back out here and settled in Napa. My father and my maternal grandfather were in business together -- "Smith and Deming Furniture Store."

My father always had asthma, and he was not happy indoors. Whether his asthma was psychosomatic or not, I don't know. I rather think it may have been, because he didn't have it until he had measles. He was at Ann Arbor starting his course in medicine when he had a very bad attack of measles. After that he had asthma. I've seen him sit up all night with his head on a pillow on the table in front of him. His doctor in Michigan said his heart simply couldn't stand it too long, so after his father died we came back out here.

After about a year in town he decided to go out into the country. He bought a mixed fruit farm in what is considered one of the most healthful spots in California, in the Napa redwoods. It was near Mount Veeder, near the camp that has been built for blind children, near Lokoya.

There were very few children up there at that time. My father was one of the school trustees practically all the time we were there. Part of the time the schoolteacher lived at our house. I was eight when we moved up there, having spent one year in town, where I was in first grade. It was a mile and three-quarters from our ranch to the school, so they let me ride Old Dick, a dapple-gray horse. I had a dog that went along with me. In order to get onto

Old Dick I had to have him sidle up against a gate so I could climb up on the gate and jump over onto his back. We crossed through several neighbors' property, and there were thirteen gates between our house and the school. I taught Old Dick to sidle up to the gate, and I would push the necessary handles to get the gate open, then we'd pull it back and close it. There was only one gate where I had to get off. That one sagged, and I had to get off and lift it.

It was a one-room school, with a little anteroom at the entrance, which held the wood needed for the stove. We had a fine teacher, Miss Herron<sup>1/</sup>. Most of the time I was the only one in my grade, so I could never get by, hoping that someone else would answer the questions. I had to be ready for all of them.

Our average attendance had to be five, in order to keep the school going. We had already consolidated two schools in order to have enough pupils, and our enrollment usually ran from seven to nine. When anyone had a contagious disease they closed the school. When I had mumps they closed school for two weeks. I was a good student, so far as attendance was concerned, but they couldn't afford to have me out two weeks for fear we wouldn't have a school the next year. It wasn't out of any consideration for me.

One year the students would go to Redwood School, which was a mile and three-quarters from our house. The next year we'd go to Lone Pine School, which was near Lokoya. That was three and a half miles. If the school-teacher was boarding at our house I would drive a cart and take the teacher up to Lone Pine with me. She was pretty much part of the family.

Mrs. Andresen

Where did you go to high school?

Mrs. Foster

I went to Napa High School. The first year, I stayed with a friend in town. This was in 1908. My best friend

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<sup>1/</sup>Spelling not verified.

was Elna Holm. She had come from Norway about three years before, not speaking any English until she learned a little on the boat. By the time she finished eighth grade in Napa she was head of her class. Elna and I used to vie for first place, but she nearly always got it. She was very bright.

The second year I went down to Santa Cruz and went to high school. I came back to Napa for the last two years. I had a little apartment in town.

Mrs. Andresen

And then you went to the University of California in Berkeley?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, I stayed there four years. My mother and father traded the ranch for a place in Berkeley and were there for the last three and a half years while I was in college. My mother said that was the happiest time of her life. She loved the programs at the Greek Theatre and all the other cultural things.

Mrs. Little

What course did you take?

Mrs. Foster

I majored in Home Economics. I had a minor in Hygiene and Economics and a minor in Chemistry. Those were my main subjects.

I belonged to Alpha Delta Pi, and for two years I was program chairman for the Unitarian young people's group. That was very interesting. Among other people we had David Starr Jordan, then president of Stanford University, come as a guest. We entertained him at lunch -- or late dinner -- at our sorority. We invited him for a two o'clock dinner. He didn't come, and he didn't come. We had a couple of Filipino cooks at that time, and they had everything just right. The silverware was arranged correctly, and our best dishes were out. The girls were all dressed up beautifully to receive David Starr Jordan -- and he didn't come.

As program chairman I had invited him, so I phoned his

daughter, who was married to a professor of Agriculture on the Berkeley campus. She said, "Oh, the last time I saw dad he was talking to so-and-so down in the Berkeley Hotel. He's probably down there now. He's a great one to forget all about meals. You'd better phone him."

So I phoned him, and he said, "Oh yes, I'm so sorry. I'll be right up."

He came up on the street car, came in to the table, and the first thing he did was to shove all the silverware away from him to make plenty of room for his arms. We were a little aghast, but from the moment he started to talk, nobody thought of anything except what he was saying. He was so delightful!

Mrs. Little

This was in your sorority house?

Mrs. Foster

Yes. We entertained many people. It was our habit to entertain a professor and his wife one night a week. We had Tommy Reed<sup>1/</sup> and his wife, and they were really wonderful. Such interesting people.

Mrs. Andresen

This was then called the Carnarvon Club?

Mrs. Foster

It was the Carnarvon Club for six or eight years, then Mrs. Reed, who was an Alpha Delta Pi, asked us to petition to become a member of that sorority, and we did. I think we were the twelfth or thirteenth sorority on the campus at that time.

Mrs. Andresen

What was the purpose of the Carnarvon Club?

Mrs. Foster

It started out as a literary and social club -- and a

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<sup>1/</sup>Spelling not verified.

house club; people lived there. Lillie Cliberon was the tall, slim girl who started it. She was still a member when I first joined. She later taught history for a long time.

Mrs. Little

What year did you graduate?

Mrs. Foster

In 1916. There were about a thousand in our class when we were freshmen, as I remember. We had some wonderful professors at that time. I was very fortunate to be there when the college was small.

Mrs. Little

Were there many girls on the campus at that time?

Mrs. Foster

Yes. I don't know how it would compare with today, but there were lots of girls. There were plenty of men, too. They had Engineering, Law, Agriculture, Chemistry, and many other courses for men.

It wasn't a new college, you know. It had been going since 1865 or something like that. North and South halls were considered old halls by the time I was there. California Hall was one of the newer buildings at that time, and the library and Boalt Hall of Law.

Hearst Hall for women was new then. The top floor of that building was for Physical Education, and the bottom floor was for women to congregate and have their lunches. In the back part they had a place to make tea and coffee, and sinks where you could wash your dishes. It was given by Phoebe Apperson Hearst. I think of her so often in connection with the tragedy of her great-granddaughter.<sup>1/</sup> Phoebe Apperson Hearst used to come to all the university meetings. She was a petite person and always dressed in lavender, often very lacy. Everyone adored her. She had given Hearst Hall and so many things. She was just a lovely person, and everyone enjoyed her.

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<sup>1/</sup>Patricia Hearst.

Mrs. Andresen

You had been married two years, then, when you came to Mill Valley?

Mrs. Foster

Yes. We lived in Petaluma a month or two after we were married. Then we went to Santa Rosa, where we had a ranch. We traded our equity in the ranch for an equity in our house on Lovell. While we still owned the ranch we lived in Berkeley for a short time, in an apartment on a quiet little street near the Claremont Hotel.

Mrs. Little

What decided you to move to Mill Valley?

Mrs. Foster

One reason was that I had always liked Mill Valley, as I mentioned in the beginning. Another was the fact that Henry's parents lived in Petaluma and mine lived in Healdsburg. Almost every weekend, or every other weekend, we would go to visit one or the other, and we would have to cross the Richmond ferry. One night we had to wait three or four hours in the cold, and we decided it was time we got on the same side of the bay that our parents were on.

Mrs. Little

Did you use the Northwestern Pacific Railroad to go north?

Mrs. Foster

No, we drove. Henry always had a car. Henry had about the second car in Petaluma.

Before Henry went into the army in the First World War he had a Buick. One day after he got into the army he happened to come upon the commanding officer, who was having trouble with his Buick. Henry said, "Perhaps I could help you," and he did. So the officer commandeered him to drive his car and keep it in shape for him. Henry never left Florida! I think he was there for sixteen

months. This was very nice. I'm glad it worked out that way.

Mrs. Little

When you came to choose your house in Mill Valley, did you have a real estate man, or did you know somebody? Whose house did you buy?

Mrs. Foster

I came over just on impulse. First I went to Sausalito. I looked at houses there, and they were quite high. Somebody told me, "Prices are about twenty-five percent higher here. Why don't you look in Mill Valley?"

So I came up to Mill Valley. I was walking around, taking a look at the town, and I met a woman sweeping the sidewalk. I said, "I wonder if you could tell me what to look for or what to avoid in Mill Valley to find a good place to live.

She looked at her watch and said, "Why yes, I can spend ten or fifteen minutes talking to you." It was Eunice Quedens.<sup>1/</sup>

Mrs. Little

Do you mean Eunice or her aunt?

Mrs. Foster

Oh -- it was her aunt, Elsie Quedens.

She said I should never buy a place on the north slope of the mountain, or even the northeast, because it doesn't get enough sun -- especially if it's a steep hill. Also, if it's on the north or northeast it's more apt to slide; that's where all the bad slides are in Mill Valley. You'll find it's true. She also said don't buy in a creek bed or too near a creek, because you won't get enough sunshine. Those were the two main things that she told me.

When I got off the train in Mill Valley I looked across the street, and here was a big bull's eye. It said

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<sup>1/</sup> Actress Eve Arden.



"Kent Real Estate." I went over, and there was Bill Nosstrand and his wife Ada. I told them what I wanted -- that I wanted to trade our equity in the Santa Rosa ranch for something in the way of residential property in Mill Valley. He took me around to see some things, but he couldn't think of any trade at the time.

I said, "We'd be willing to come over here and rent a place for awhile until we got to know the area better." So we went up on the hill, and here was a dirty, old cabin with about three rooms in it. It was supposed to be partly furnished. It had an old stove, kitchen table, sink, and an old bed, and that was about it. They wanted \$35 a month for it. We were renting a lovely apartment in Berkeley for \$35 in 1923, so I wasn't interested in that.

Ada said, "You know, I think that man up on Lovell Avenue has the ranch bug." I was so disgusted with the ranch at that point that I thought, "Ranch 'bug' is right!"

We got in touch with the man, and we made the trade. The reason I was disgusted with the ranch was that we had bought in an area that was considered the finest ground for walnut and fruit trees. When Henry came home from the war he said he never wanted to work inside again; he wanted to be outdoors. We had trees on the property that were between three and four years old. He dug around them and hand-watered them. He got a job at Sherman & Clay to support us while we waited for the trees to start bearing. After a war, however, you find you have a depression. Sherman & Clay sell luxury things. It wasn't a very good time to sell grand pianos -- or even plain pianos. It was hard to sell a Victrola, and they were very popular in those days.

Every three weeks we had to rent a tractor from the next door neighbor (it was \$15 if Henry ran it, \$20 if the neighbor ran it) to keep the morning glories down. We did that, and the trees were growing beautifully. We were within one-half mile of the Vrooman Orchard. Mrs. Vrooman was the mother of a friend of mine in Berkeley, and she was supposed to have the biggest and best walnut orchard in the world, I think! So we thought, of course, that it must be a wonderful place.

After a year's work, a freeze came along. First of all the weather turned warm, and the sap started to flow. Then a freeze came along, and the sap soured. The prunes

froze worse than the walnuts. You'd go down the rows of prune trees, and it would smell just like vinegar -- a sour smell. I can remember Henry walking down the rows with tears streaming down his face, saying, "The dead and the dying. The dead and the dying." Overnight we lost eighty percent of what we'd put into it -- eighty percent of the trees. So we were in debt more than we could recover from the crops.

However, we did transfer the equity on the ranch to the other property in Mill Valley. They raised their price a little bit; we raised our price a little bit, and I believe we got \$300 out of the ranch when we sold.

Mrs. Little

Do you remember what you had to pay for a house in Mill Valley in those days?

Mrs. Foster

It was supposed to be \$3,500.

Mrs. Little

Is it the place where Dr. Dietrich lives now?

Mrs. Foster

Dr. Dietrich bought it from the people we sold it to.

Mrs. Andresen

What was the address on Lovell?

Mrs. Foster

It used to be 140, I think, or 144. Those numbers were changed during the time we lived there. It was on the upper side, and next door was the old Schiemann house.<sup>1/</sup>

Beyond that was the house where Dr. Spottiswood lived. Mrs. Spottiswood was the sister of Michael O'Shaughnessy.

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<sup>1/</sup>Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Schiemann lived at 142 Lovell Avenue.

We used to enjoy hearing her play her grand piano. Dr. Spottiswood came over when my mother was ill and passed away. Mr. and Mrs. Schiemann were a German couple; they were very nice neighbors.

When I went down to the PG&E, I found that our next door neighbors on the other side were named Barash. When I was in Napa High School, Sholom Barash was president of the junior class and I was vice president. I also knew two of his sisters. So I waited until I saw an older woman go out to the Barash mailbox, and I went out and said, "Would you by any chance be related to Sholom Barash who went to Napa High School from 1909 to 1912?" She said, "He's my son." I told her I had gone to school with him. She threw her arms around me, and from that time on I was an adopted daughter in this very nice Jewish family.

Mrs. Barash had emigrated from Russia. At two o'clock in the morning she had fled, across a mile-long bridge, never knowing when someone might shoot at her. She escaped and came to New York. Her sweetheart had come ahead of her and started a cap factory, so they made caps in Napa. Then he died and left her with five children to raise. They all turned out to be very fine young people. We were very good friends.

Mrs. Andresen

Had the Barashes retired by that time?

Mrs. Foster

No, no. Mrs. Barash was trying to keep her family of five together. Only one son was working at that time -- the one who was my age. Later the girls went to work. One of them married. Then the younger boy went to work. They were all at an age when they were commencing to bring in a little something.

She would sit up late at night reading Dostoevski. I'd see her light at two o'clock in the morning.

Mrs. Little

In 1923, had Old Mill School been built?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, it was pretty new, but it had been built.

Mrs. Little

I graduated in 1921 from Summit School, and I was in the last full class. So Old Mill must have been brand new when you were were there.

I wonder whether you remember the old sulphur spring that was in the schoolyard.

Mrs. Foster

I remember there was a spring up on the sidehill, but I didn't know it was a sulphur spring.

When I first came to Mill Valley I met some of the people who had children at Old Mill. They said, "You've been a teacher. Why don't you join our PTA?" I thought that was a good way to help do something, so I joined. The year before, they had worked very hard to help finish the tennis courts, and when I went in we finished what was left to do. We also gave several shows. My friend George Ott came down two or three times from Petaluma and put on the Petaluma Minstrel Show, which was famous at that time. We made quite good money from the show and used it for finishing the tennis courts. We also bought unfinished hardwood furniture from some friend of Mrs. Seymour's, and we finished it up and stained it for the teachers' room. Some of that was still in use years later. We made curtains and cushions and fixed it up.

Mrs. Little

You had no children, and yet you were doing all this?

Mrs. Foster

I was interested in their children. And I got acquainted with so many nice people. Sally Bryant became one of my best friends; she had five children. Helen Chesnut had her two sons, and we became good friends. I got to know lots of nice people through the PTA. Soon I was made program chairman.

One day I was walking down Cascade. It was a muddy

street then; it wasn't paved. Very few streets were paved. Somebody came along in an old Ford and said, "Would you like a ride?" I got in, and it was Estelle Brand. That was my introduction to her. We became very good friends. In fact, it was she who told us of this house, and that's how we happened to move here.

Estelle Brand was a brilliant woman. Her father was named Baker; he was paymaster at the San Francisco Presidio. Baker Street near the Presidio is named for him. When Estelle went to school (she was Estelle Baker then), she sat in front of Arthur Brand. Arthur used to dip her pig-tails in the inkwell. I'd had some problems like that, too, with ink spots on my white sailor suit when I first went to high school, so I had a feeling for her.

Arthur Brand later went to Mexico, and for fifteen years was the legal secretary to Diaz of Mexico.<sup>1/</sup> I think it was after he came back that they were married. They lived on Hazel Avenue. She was a wonderful gardener. She also knew a lot about psychology and education. She was our speaker at Old Mill School many times. If someone else failed to show up, I could call Estelle. You know how it is if you're program chairman and somebody gets laryngitis just in time for the program! You have to have a substitute ready, and Estelle was so good about anything like that.

We had a principal at Old Mill who many of us felt was not the right kind of person -- not at all fair to the teachers. We wanted to get a new board of trustees, and we persuaded Estelle to run. It happened that Ralston White was running that year. I met him one day at the Bank of America, which was then the Mill Valley Bank, and asked him, "Are you going to keep Mr. Ray as principal if you go in as trustee?" "Oh yes," he said, "I think he's a very fine man. I've talked to him, and he seems very good." (Ray was a smooth talker!) I said, "Well, I'm awfully sorry, then, but I'm going to have to be for your competitor." Within a short time after Ralston White became a board member, he discovered he didn't believe in Mr. Ray, either. Ray was fired from Old Mill School and went to Palo Alto.

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<sup>1/</sup> Porfirio Diaz was president of Mexico at the turn of the century.

It was interesting that I made a friend of Ralston White by telling him that I was going to vote for his opponent!

Mrs. Andresen

Can you tell us when you started El Paseo, and how you happened to develop it?

Mrs. Foster

That's quite a long story. For a long time I had thought that a lot of the buildings in Mill Valley were awfully ugly. For one thing, somebody must have had a lot of cheap green paint, and they must have sold it very reasonably. Quite a few buildings were spoiled by it. It would have been all right for a fence or something, but they had painted the overhangs green and other things that looked dreadful.

I'd had a little experience in remodeling, and I thought it would be possible to make a building that would be beautiful and would pay its way just as well as those ugly things. Henry and I used to drive downtown at night and park the car by the Outdoor Art Club to go to the Sequoia Theatre. We almost never looked across the street at the Holtum Building without saying, "That's so ugly! Why doesn't somebody buy it and paint it or do something to it?"

One Saturday the phone rang; it was my friend Sally Bryant, who was by then in real estate. She said, "Edna, I have a good business buy for you." I said, "I don't know anything about business property." She said, "You could learn. It wouldn't hurt you to look, would it? The man came down \$1,000 in his price yesterday."

The property was the Holtum Building. We went down and looked at it, and it was very solidly built -- except for some additions that had been made after the original builder died. I wish I could remember the name of the man who built it. He'd work all day long and by lamplight until far into the night. His wife would hold the lantern for him. He finally died when the building was almost finished. The porch still had to be built onto the back part. Holtum bought it, and he must have hired the cheapest contractor he could get to build on that back part -- a sunporch area back there toward Sunnyside.

Mrs. Andresen

Did he build stores or flats?

Mrs. Foster

It was just like the San Francisco buildings, with stores downstairs and flats upstairs. It could have been moved over here from any dozens of San Francisco streets.

Anyway, we looked it over and decided it was really very solid and that things could be done to make it look better. So we made an offer on it, and we bought it. This was in 1936.

On the lower floor was Myer's Cleaners; that was all. The second floor was vacant. The third floor was rented by Mrs. Myer's brother and sister-in-law, who paid \$25 a month for that flat. The sister-in-law was a disagreeable person, and nobody else could live on the second floor. I'd go down to collect her rent, and she'd say, "Well, here's \$21. You can come next week for the rest of it." Her husband finally committed suicide; I guess she drove him crazy. It wasn't very long before one of my friends called and said, "I see your tenant on the top floor is moving." I said, "Good! That's fine!"

After we got her out, I contracted with a nice middle-aged woman from Texas and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Manning. They took the flat, between us we furnished it, and they rented it as a roominghouse. She used to say, "If each room had its own bath, it would be so easy to rent." Of course in the old days, each big flat had just one bathroom and that was that. There was one big living room, one big dining room, one big kitchen, and the built-on sunporch. We found out when we remodeled that we could make two apartments on each floor very nicely. We had a clever plumber who would go into the big bathroom with a piece of chalk and mark here and here and here and make two bathrooms out of it. We made very usable one- and two-room studio apartments out of it.

When we first bought the building, Henry wanted me just to repaint it. I said, "No, that isn't enough. It's off-center." It was twenty-eight feet wide, and the center post was way over like this. It made it look terribly lopsided. When we remodeled it, we had to put a big beam across and move the post until it was centered. Sometimes you can

have an off-center post and balance it, but this wasn't balanced in any way.

I looked around at other designs. I liked gardens. My dentist, Dr. Lorne Tanner, liked gardens. (His father, who also liked gardens, was a dentist; his sister was a dentist; and his brother-in-law was a dentist.) I was garden chairman for the Outdoor Art Club at the time, and Dr. Tanner asked me one day if I could arrange a garden tour for his father, who was visiting here from Canada. I took the two of them on a garden tour, and <sup>1/</sup> then went to San Rafael for lunch at La Petite Auberge. I think it was called the Patio Restaurant at that time. It was very charming. Among other things it had an old wellhead, with a little drip of water coming down from the bucket. They had movable canvas awnings that you could draw across to make shade if it was too sunny.

We had a delightful meal, and it was such a pretty place. This was before I learned to drive, yet I made three trips back to San Rafael to find out who had remodeled it before I found out it was Gus Costigan. He did it during the depression for a woman who had the dairy creamery across the street. He did it for \$3,500 on a land-lease only; Mr. Alberts kept the property. The woman made money by doing it that way.

I decided Gus was the man I must have, so I got in touch with him. He was busy building a place up in Vacaville for his sister, so I couldn't get him. I waited and waited. Finally I was just about to sign up with Frederick Bigland in San Jose, who did very nice English architecture. He had the plans all drawn and everything, when Gus came to our front door one night and said, "You folks still want to remodel that Holtum Building?" When we said yes, he came in and commenced drawing the plans right then and there for El Paseo.

Mrs. Little

Did Gus live in Mill Valley then?

Mrs. Foster

No, he lived in Ross. He later moved to Sausalito,

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<sup>1/</sup>704 Fourth Street, San Rafael.



and then he moved up here. He lived at El Paseo part of the time while we were remodeling it.

Miss Stewart<sup>1/</sup> lived in her apartment through the whole remodeling process. She was there over twenty years. She sold Avon products all that time. Even after she had broken her hip and was in a wheelchair, she continued to sell Avon products and make a living out of it. She also acted as my agent to receive the rents, and for this she got a very nominal rental. She was a wonderful person.

Mrs. Andresen

She was related to the Bostwicks, wasn't she?

Mrs. Foster

She was a cousin of Grandmother Bostwick -- Mrs. Frank Bostwick. A sort of double cousin, actually, since brothers married sisters.

Mrs. Little

From whom did you buy the property?

Mrs. Foster

From Mr. Holtum.

Mrs. Little

Did his property include the land that El Paseo is built on?

Mrs. Foster

Yes. The old house covered only twenty-five feet of the lot. There was another fifteen feet -- it was all one lot. Then, before we started remodeling the front, we bought the adjoining lot in back, the one that goes through to Sunnyside. We bought that in 1940, from a Sacramento man named Stephenson.

Mrs. Little

Were the Suey Kees there then?

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<sup>1/</sup>Miss Jeanette Stewart.

Mrs. Foster

Yes, they were down the street.

Mrs. Little

Was<sup>1</sup>/there a building where Bennett's Variety Store is now?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, the building was there, but I can't recall who was in it.

Mrs. Andresen

Who were some of the interesting tenants you've had?

Mrs. Foster

We've had so many interesting tenants! Ann Blanford was one of them. She's still alive, at 90, over in Sausalito.

Mrs. Andresen

What did she do?

Mrs. Foster

She had a gift shop. She also painted portraits, landscapes, and so forth.

Mrs. Andresen

This photograph on the wall was taken at the opening of El Paseo?

Mrs. Foster

It was taken May 15, 1948 when we opened the middle part and the restaurant opened under the ownership of Mildred ("Midge") Snell and Amy Hanson.

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<sup>1</sup>/19 Throckmorton Avenue.

Mrs. Andresen

And the painting in your living room?

Mrs. Foster

Nevin Kempthorne did it a number of years later. She did it just after I had the flu, and it made me look ten years older than I was at that time. It doesn't even look like me now, because I'm so much thinner.

I'm wearing a hand-made Portugese dress in the portrait -- hand woven, hand embroidered. I bought it in 1940 or '41 when we had a show in the new part of El Paseo, the Sunnyside end, for British war relief. We held it for one week. We served tea in the little cottage every afternoon under the auspices of Mrs. Horace Coffin. We had to heat the water on a double electric plate because there were no stoves connected at that time. We made over a thousand dollars in one week's time.

This Portugese costume was hanging up with all the clothes for sale. I saw it and immediately wanted it, but Henry and I had a lot of bills to pay for the remodelling, so I thought it was something I could do without. However, on the last day the cost of everything was cut in half, so I bought it. I used it ever after, instead of a Spanish costume, because it's so similar. In the beginning years of El Paseo we had at least five annual Spanish festivals, and I always wore the costume. It brought a certain gaiety to the occasion. Our festivals were always in costume, because that breaks the ice. People could come in costume or not, as they pleased.

The festival on May 15, 1948, when we finished the middle part, was one of the biggest ones.

Mrs. Andresen

Over how long a period did you develop El Paseo?

Mrs. Foster

We bought it in 1936, and I sold it in 1964.<sup>1/</sup>

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<sup>1/</sup>Other sources show the date as 1961.

Mrs. Little

But it was virtually finished by 1948?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, all but a little paving.

El Paseo was built in three stages. During 1940 we remodeled the Holtum Building. In 1941 we did all the Sunnyside end and put a brick face over the little cottage, which had been just a shingle cottage where a family lived. They had had a woodshed and garage next door, which we had to tear down to let people pass through.

Mrs. House, Tessie House,<sup>1/</sup> ran a little restaurant, just for dinners. She required reservations, and you sometimes had to wait a little while for your meal. She had a card that said, "Excellent food requires time and care in preparation, and I want to serve excellent food." She had quite a reputation. She could serve as many as eighteen -- and did sometimes, all by herself.

Mrs. Little

That's the building in the Sunnyside end that still has a fireplace in it?

Mrs. Foster

Yes. I don't know what's in there now. Nevin Kempthorne was in there for a while, and then there was a beauty shop.

Mrs. Little

When did you complete the apartments that are above the present restaurant location -- the curved stairway, and all that?

Mrs. Foster

All that part of the remodeling began in the fall of '47 and ended in May '48. My birthday comes on the 18th of March, and the boys gave me a birthday on top of the

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<sup>1/</sup>Spelling not verified.

subflooring of the second floor. That was the most unique birthday party I ever had. It really was fun.

Mrs. Little

When did you do the interesting plantings that are there?

Mrs. Foster

As each section was finished, I'd start planting. The bougainvillea vine was planted as soon as we finished the middle part.

Mrs. Andresen

Was Sam Newsom in El Paseo?

Mrs. Foster

No, he was really next door, but we took out the fence between and used it all as one big patio. We had lovely big festivals at that time. When Ann Blanford had her gift shop, she called it The Unusual Shop, and it was truly unusual. She would have a festival for a different country each month. She'd have the consul and his wife and children from that particular country come over from San Francisco, and she'd serve tea. If the weather was nice we'd have everything out in the patio. Charles Durrie would co-operate and have a nice exhibit of his interior decorating things, and Sam Newsom would have his bonsai trees and his gifts, and everybody wandered through from one side to the other. That was a very interesting time. Ann would exhibit not only the things that she sold from those countries but also collections of things that people would lend her.

Mrs. Andresen

Didn't you have a music studio at one time?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, we had a music studio in #1 El Paseo, at the Sunnyside end, when we first opened. Ruth Sheline<sup>1/</sup> had

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<sup>1/</sup>Spelling not verified.

it, and her place was lovely. She had an old square Steinway piano, which she'd spent quite a lot of money having completely restored. She had a horsehair trunk that had come around the horn; this was filled with some antiques and some music and things and she kept it in the window, just for trimming. She had lovely Oriental rugs.

She also sold records, and she developed an interesting and practical idea. One person who took it up was a carpenter who wanted his children to have a well-rounded musical education. Each payday he would come in and buy a record, and she planned his purchases so that he would have a well-rounded library of music. She was doing very well, when along came the war and the government froze wax, so they could make no more records. She gave up and went to work in a government war plant. It made everybody sick.

Mrs. Little

Wasn't Barry Mineah in there at one time?

Mrs. Foster

Barry Mineah had an apartment upstairs and taught music there.

Mrs. Andresen

Gus Costigan developed some other downtown property in Mill Valley. Were you involved in that?

Mrs. Foster

In 1950 I bought some buildings from Mr. Drexler. This included Rutherford's Drug Store and the two buildings next door to it. The back part was the shop of the Mill Valley Record. There was also a vacant lot in back, 40 feet by 40 feet, and a piece of land that went out to the street, 10 by 60. That made access from Corte Madera, right opposite the City Hall. At a later time, <sup>1/</sup>after the Record moved, that became the City Hall Annex.

In the beginning, <sup>2/</sup>the Record used what is now Dr. Rice's optometrist's office. It's a narrow space, and they had

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<sup>1/</sup> 21 Corte Madera Avenue.

<sup>2/</sup> 70 Throckmorton Avenue.

one desk right after another. I can remember Lucretia Hanson's desk and the others, crowded so close together. There was a door at the back that went into the print-shop where they printed the paper. They had to dig a huge hole to accommodate the press. When we built the additional building to house the press, we had to put in double garage doors so the full space of ten feet was open to move the press in. They used to back the trucks in with those big rolls of paper that weighed so many tons. This was really very hard on the paving. We put in brick and concrete paving, and it's still hollowed down in places from the weight of those trucks.

Mrs. Andresen

What was in that space before you developed it?

Mrs. Foster

An old bedstead, the fender of an old car...

Mrs. Little

Before that, it had been the old railroad right-of-way, hadn't it?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, the mountain railway went through there.

Mrs. Little

Do you know who Mr. Drexler bought the right-of-way from?

Mrs. Foster

No, I'm not sure. The concrete building next to the Drexler property, and which he had bought by that time, was owned by our former assemblyman, Dick McCollister.

Mrs. Andresen

Mr. Drexler was at one time the owner of the Mill Valley Record.

Mrs. Foster

Yes, he and his wife owned it. The Record moved down

from Madrona, a place that used to be a mortuary.<sup>1/</sup> Winona and Elizabeth Douglas had the paper when it was on Madrona. After they moved down, the Drexlers bought it from them.

Mrs. Little

You had Gus Costigan redesign the front of the building that is now on Throckmorton?

Mrs. Foster

Yes, he did all of them. We did it in two stages. It's really two buildings. One holds Rutherford's Drugs and Dr. Rice's. It's a wooden building which held a general merchandise store that belonged to a couple of old ladies when I came here. I used to go there to buy thread. One of them was Effie Thacker. The other building was occupied at that time by Cagwin, Hamilton, and Seymour. It was quite a cute little building, completely separate from the other building. It had three little dove-cotes in the points of the roof, and Bill Hamilton said, "We have our own identity; we don't want it changed. We'll just leave it the way it is." Well, after the other building was remodeled and he saw how charming it was, he was sorry.

While Bill was in Europe (but with his permission) Kent Seymour and the others bought land down on East Blithedale and built their own place.<sup>2/</sup> They really needed more room, so it worked out very nicely.

After that I rented the building to the florist, Normand Black. He was going to leave his aunt and uncle's shop and have his own. He wanted all the glass he could have across the front, so we changed it and put in lots of glass. We had it just about finished when he came and said, "I'd like very much not to take the place. My uncle and aunt are willing to sell now, and I'd like to buy them out and stay right there." So I rented to somebody else.

Mrs. Andresen

Did Ellis Bell have his Clock Shop...?

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<sup>1/</sup> Another early Mill Valley resident, George Pimlott, says the Mill Valley Record office was "next door" to Keaton and Dowd's mortuary.

<sup>2/</sup> 206 East Blithedale Avenue.



Mrs. Foster

Ellis Bell had his shop in El Paseo, in what was the little cottage. We had a watch shop next door, after Mrs. House left the restaurant. Ellis Bell had a marvelous antique French clock in the window, very decorative and beautiful. They had about three workmen working all the time, and they never could keep up with the orders. Eventually Ellis Bell had a chance to rent what had been the telephone office on Throckmorton.<sup>1/</sup> It was just a plain yellow brick building, so he had Gus Costigan come and put a cute front on it.

After we started building, everybody downtown took notice and commenced to do something a little different. At Rutherford's Drug Store there's a step up from the sidewalk before you go in the door. If you didn't have a planter there, someone might fall and break a leg. So we put in a planter, with a fuschia plant and a little live oak tree about two inches tall. That tree has now pretty much taken over; it's probably the only bonzaied live oak tree in Mill Valley. It's decorative, it keeps people from falling, and it's an interesting way to get around what would otherwise be an obstacle. We did the same thing at the foot of the stairs in El Paseo as you come down from the second floor. That had been a closed stairway, and it was dark. I thought, "Now what can we do to let a little light and air in there?"

Mrs. Little

Gus Costigan also did over the front of Varney's Hardware Store the same way?<sup>2/</sup>

Mrs. Foster

Yes, he blasted the brick and made a cute entrance, and so forth.

Mrs. Andresen

Did Mr. Costigan design the Cagwin, Seymour, and Hamilton building?

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<sup>1/</sup> 131 Throckmorton Avenue.

<sup>2/</sup> 57 Throckmorton Avenue.

Mrs. Foster

Yes, he designed it and built it. He also did some remodeling of Mr. Hamilton's home.<sup>1/</sup> He built several charming houses out Cascade. One of them was for a woman from Boston. She wanted the foundations of her house to go right down into the creek so she could hear and feel the water going around her foundations. He built a number of lovely homes in Corte Madera Canyon, out West Blithedale. Most of his houses are over in Peacock Gap in San Rafael.

Gus and his wife have moved to Rancho Santa Fe. Gus was getting so he couldn't play golf with any comfort because of arthritis. So he went down to Santa Fe, and it's so warm he can play golf or do anything. He's building some beautiful homes down there. And things grow so fast! My chiropractor friend, Dr. Paul Henrie, visited Gus down there, and he says an oleander plant grows from a gallon size to six feet tall in one year.

When Gus started to remodel El Paseo he lived there. It got pretty drafty and cold, but there was no way to prevent this because we were taking all the windows out. So he came up here and stayed. He lived here about eight years. He was away during the war, but he came back afterwards and lived here off and on for a number of years.

Mrs. Little

Do you know anything about the Costigan family -- the father or grandfather -- how they came to Mill Valley?

Mrs. Foster

I do know that Gus's grandmother was the second Mrs. Costigan; she was his stepgrandmother. Later there was an estrangement in the family. Gus was not allowed to know his grandfather when he was little. He later regretted this so much, because the grandfather was a fine old gentleman. He was a grain broker, I believe, and he made lots of money. His hobby was dishes. His wife never knew when he was going to come home with a whole new set of Limoges china or something else that had taken his fancy

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<sup>1/</sup> 353 Summit Avenue.

in San Francisco.

Gus Costigan's father married a girl from the south. She was the heiress to quite a large southern estate. When she came out, she brought with her the woman who had been her governess and had taken care of her. The woman lived with them the rest of her life.

Mrs. Little

Was she a black woman?

Mrs. Foster

No, she was a white woman. Very nice, well educated. She was just part of the family. Gus had three or four sisters, but he was the only boy. They lived in San Rafael, in back of Dominican, on quite a bit of property. This land was important to Gus. When he was just eighteen he built two houses across the road from their house but still on part of his mother's property. She let him build the houses and sell them. I later went to see one of the houses. Gus had invented an interlocking tile, and he thought his father was going to patent it. But his father was not one to push things, and he never got around to it. Those houses, ten or fifteen years later, were just as good as ever, and the people who lived there were very happy with them. They're still there. I'm pretty sure the street is Palm Avenue.

Mrs. Little

Is all his work represented by the carved redwood and brick?

Mrs. Foster

Oh no, he did a good many with a very Oriental look over at Peacock Gap. He's done other things, too.

Mrs. Andresen

Did he have architectural training?

Mrs. Foster

No, he just had a natural skill. He read all the architectural magazines he could lay his hands on. He just

was a genius along that line. He went to work as a carpenter and learned that end of it with his men. But he knew what he wanted, and he'd get what he wanted.

Mrs. Little

What clubs did you belong to here in Mill valley, or what activities did you have when you were younger?

Mrs. Foster

As I told you, I was PTA president at Old Mill School. Then I was the literary chairman for the Outdoor Art Club for two years. We took our literary group over to the new Marin Junior College, which was just starting and needed attendance. We got about eighteen or twenty "students," and this helped them with their budget the first year. We had a Miss Okerlund as our teacher.

Mrs. Little

She was my teacher, too.

Mrs. Foster

Wasn't she delightful? We loved all the things she taught us of the Norwegian poets and writers.

The next year we took International Relations, under the supervision of Dr. Lynn T. White. He had various people come to speak to us, and one speaker was the head of the educational department at San Quentin. He gave us the same intelligence test he had given to the men in prison. Of course we all wanted to know how we fared. He said, "I can't tell you what each one got, but I will tell you that the average is just about the same as it is in San Quentin." We didn't have the big head any more after that.

I became very interested in gardening. I had five years as head of that section, part of the time for the Community Church and part for the Outdoor Art Club. We met together, so it was sort of a united effort. I had different co-chairmen through the years.

I didn't belong to any lodges, because Henry wouldn't go out at night and I didn't want to go alone.

I was on the Republican Central Committee for about

twelve years. I was women's chairman a couple of years. That took a lot of time. It was at the same time that I was doing El Paseo, so I had to juggle my schedule.

Mrs. Little

How did you happen to buy this house at 175 Hillside?

Mrs. Foster

I had invited my friend Estelle Brand and her husband home for dinner one evening at our house on Lovell. Estelle had been working on her campaign to become school trustee. I knew she was tired, so when she said she had to go home and get something for Arthur to eat, I said, "Oh, come home and eat with us." I stopped and bought some steak, and by the time Estelle had finished her work and our husbands had come home from their offices, dinner was almost ready. Henry was entertaining them in the living room and I was in the kitchen putting the finishing touches on a lemon pie. I had just put it in the oven when Henry came into the kitchen and said, "Estelle says if we want a house with a view we should buy Lucy Cook's house on Hillside."

The next night we came up here and looked at the house. Looking at it from below, with the bright moonlight shining on the white stucco front, it looked perfectly huge. Next morning we went through the house, and we could understand why it had remained vacant from January until then, which was about the first of April. The brown caterpillars on the oak trees were so bad that year that they completely covered the yellow fire hydrants; you couldn't see the yellow at all. One of the upstairs windows had blown off, and the caterpillars had come in. They had been stepped on and were smeared all over the floor. When the rugs had been taken up, great wads of the padding had been left on the floor. They looked like dead rats. Between the smashed and crawling caterpillars and the old padding -- and a very dark wallpaper -- the place looked very dismal. The fireplace wasn't as large as it is now. The front porch hadn't been glassed in. There was much to be desired. A family with children had been renting the house, and the children had been all over the house with their skates on and had used their BB guns inside.

Anyway, we eventually decided we'd buy it, and within ten days we had it. Then we had to decide what to do with

it! I figured the first thing was to make the opening in the fireplace bigger because it always smoked, so we hired a very nice Danish bricklayer to rebuild the fireplace. We made it one tile higher. There had been three tiles above and three below, which wasn't a good division in the first place. So now we have two tiles above and four below, and it has never smoked.

Mrs. Andresen

Who built the house originally?

Mrs. Foster

Gus Armbruster. I found his name and the date, 1907, on one of the floor joists in the basement. It's still there. I think it was built for a family named Muller, who moved over from San Francisco. Just before they moved in, the husband died, but the wife and her son and daughter came over.

One day after World War II a man and his wife and young son came to the back door, and the man said, "Pardon me, but would you mind if we looked around the yard? I used to live here as a boy." I said, "Then you must be Mrs. Muller's boy" -- or whatever the name was, and he said yes. They came in and looked through the house. The man said there had been a grand piano in the corner where I had mine. There had been a desk where I had the record player. I had taken out the wood boxes beside the fireplace, and we had put the electric organ in there. It seemed a good place because Henry could have his back to the light, and he could face the audience.

Originally the front entrance was on the south side of the house. People came up from the street below. This was in the horse-and-buggy days. The steps are still there, but we've let the Scotch broom grow up and obliterate them because we don't want people coming in that way any more. There was a large terrace, about 15 by 15, and then some more steps up to the house. I never know what to call the "front" of the house. After the automobile came along, people parked above the house and walked down. So the patio became the front entrance. It was never glorified as a main entrance -- it's just a patio entrance and that's all.

Mrs. Little

Have you ever figured out how many rooms there are in the house?

Mrs. Foster

There are nine rooms, if you count the sunroom. And then there's a big attic. I once had furniture for a seven-room house stored up there for three or four years. Another time I stored furniture for a long time for a friend, so it's been very useful.

Mrs. Andresen

Can you tell us something about your work with the Republican Central Committee?

Mrs. Foster

I started in about 1940. I withdrew gradually because I really got very tired. Mr. Livermore was on the committee at that time, and Mr. Trumbull, and Judge Harlan.

I can remember when Noel Giacomini ran. I worked particularly hard for him because he seemed such a nice young man. He has been a very good public servant.

Mrs. Little

That must have been in about 1951 or '52.

Note: The tape (and the interview) ended at this point.

Dear Betsy and Bob:

I thought you might find this write-up on El Paseo interesting.

Further interest in El Paseo came from Mr. Song who is a prominent banker and businessman in Seoul and a friend of Sangkyu Lee. He asked for copies of the plans and specifications of El Paseo to take back to Korea with him.

Sincerely,

*Edna*



*Edna Foster, in authentic hand made and hand woven costume, worn at  
all five fiestas and art shows at El Paseo.*



Photograph by Arlene Blake, May 15, 1948.