

Down Memory Lane
Mary Etta Broadwell

Italia Richmond Cook

Even today when the diversified activities of women are commonplace, the energetic life of Italia Cook would attract comment. Place the environment of her life more than 50 years ago, when the average woman had few interests beyond her household, and Mrs. Cook's deeds become magnified- a life highlighted by the unusual.

She and two of her daughters, Alice, and Frances, came from their home in Clinton, Iowa to Covina in 1886. Arriving at the old Southern Pacific station in Puente one December night, the conductor held the train, which was several hours late, until he assured himself that someone was at the station to meet her.

When he saw her greet her father, J. R. Richmond, he was satisfied and allowed the train to proceed. Mr. Richmond, at that time owned 40 acres of land, the greatest percentage of it within what is now the city limits of Covina. This was his daughter's first visit since he moved to California from the Midwest.

Intending to stay only a few weeks and with no other possessions than her luggage, Mrs. Cook was so impressed with the climate of California over the 20 below zero weather she had left in Iowa, that she prevailed upon her husband, Benjamin Franklin Cook, to sell their eastern interests and join his family in Covina. Their third daughter, Mary, was then attending school in Milwaukee.

Soon after becoming established in her father's home, located on the present site of the Bank of America building, Mrs. Cook became a guiding force in the community.

She was tremendously interested in the growth of the village and contributed in a large measure to its civic and cultural life. It was she who gave the land to the city for the public library and part of the land for the Episcopal church and parish hall at Third and Badillo street.

Being a splendid musician, she gave music lessons to the children of Covina's early settlers, finding time in a busy life to assure the young people of that day a knowledge of one of the fine arts.

The property she inherited from her father included a grain field which her husband later planted to an orchard.

When Covina was plotted, Second Street ran through the orchard, and Mrs. Cook deeded that portion to the city. Today, Second Street is the wildest and one of the most attractive streets in Covina. In her honor Italia Street was given her name.

Being a devout Episcopalian, she arranged during those first few years, for people of the Episcopal faith to meet at her home for services every other Sunday. On alternate Sundays they met at the J.S. Phillips home at Hollenbeck and San Bernardino Road.

Each week Mr. Cook met the train at Glendora and brought Dr. Brow, a retired Pomona minister, to Covina to preach the sermon. This was in 1889. Later services were held in the Social Hall where Chauncey's is now located. When the building was sold to John Coolman, the organ was moved (by men of the parish carrying it) to Mr. Richmond's farm implement store on the present site of the San Gabriel Milling company, and services were held there.

When the congregation had increased the first Episcopal church was built. That first building is now used as the parish hall of the Holy Trinity church.

Mrs. Cook was church organist and for 17 years never missed a service nor a choir practice. One of her most treasured possessions was an inscribed gold cross presented to her when she retired. She was one of the first members of the Bishop's Guild in Los Angeles and for many years attended almost every weekly meeting.

A devoted wife and excellent mother to her three daughters, Mrs. Cook's amazing energy made it possible for her to serve on committees and spend a considerable amount of time engaged in philanthropic activities. She was well liked by everyone, particularly the children of the town who affectionately called her Mother Cook.

A clever businesswoman, she handled her own real estate interests. Her sound advice was often sought on problems on civic interest and she always had something constructive to suggest.

After selling her father's house Mrs. Cook and her husband built at Second and College streets and their home was one of the centers of the town's social life.

In her leisurely moments and as she grew older, she did exquisite needle work. The elaborate and beautiful altar frontal she made for the Episcopal church of Minneapolis many years ago is still in use. Among her many friends were General and Mrs. Fremont.

Leading an active and vigorous life until shortly before her death in 1923 at the age of 80, Mrs. Cook's influence on the community will be felt for many years to come.

Mr. Cook, who passed away in 1904, was trained as a pharmacist and was an assistant surgeon in the Union Army. An extremely intelligent man, he helped organize the G.A.R. and is credited with the inventing of the modern fire extinguisher.

Like so many inventions, the idea of putting out a blaze using chemicals was pure chance. In his younger years, Mr. Cook was employed by a wholesale drug house and when a fire broke out in his laboratory, he threw some handy chemicals on the flames which extinguished them immediately. After several experiments he finally perfected an extinguisher which was successfully marketed.

Mr. and Mrs. Cook are survived by two daughters living in Covina, Mrs. Alice Clapp and Mrs. Ed Prather.