

The Posy Parade: A Unique Tradition

Maryanne Dornlas

San Bruno's Posy Parade is a celebration of the community's children that evolved from the Admission Day Parade the city held each September starting in the 1920s. Those parades consisted of the usual mix of bands and dignitaries waving from flag-bedecked fire trucks as well as a procession of children and young women chosen as the "Queen" and her court.

In 1941, Wayne Poland, a member of a service organization called the Exchange Club, had the idea of a "festival of flowers" dedicated to children. The late Carl Hultberg, an Exchange Club member, recalled, "We wanted to pattern the parade after the Tournament of Roses in Pasadena, so we selected a popular flower, the posy, to name the parade after."

The first parade attracted about 80 children who assembled on Hensley Avenue and marched from San Bruno Avenue to Huntington Avenue and then south on San Mateo Avenue. The marchers were grouped into "divisions" which included wheeled toys, pulled wagons or carts, doll and baby carriages, bicycles, floats done by groups or children's organizations and "unique or original ideas."

The parade grew in popularity during the War years and in 1943 the parade route was extended across El Camino to the City Park on Crystal Springs Road. In 1944, Patty Lang rode a pony in the parade as the first Posy Parade Princess. In the early years, the princess was chosen by a superintendent of the San Bruno Park School District. Starting in 1970, the princess and her court were chosen by drawing.

To raise funds for the parade, the first Posy Parade Ball was held in 1945 at the North Brae School. The Ball became an annual event and for at least ten years was held at the Tanforan Race Track Clubhouse. The 1953 Ball, which the Exchange Club hailed as "San Bruno's most gala social event," featured a ten-piece

orchestra. Tickets sold for \$1.00 each.

From 1945 to 1950, a baseball game called "The Posy Parade Classic" was held in City Park after the parade pitting teams from North Brae and Edgemont Elementary Schools against each other. Through the years various other pairs of local schools vied to win the big game. Currently, the challengers are Parkside Intermediate School and St. Robert's Catholic School.

In 1955, the Exchange Club disbanded and the Optimists club took over and worked tirelessly to fund and organize a parade that was truly achieving fame. As San Bruno's population ballooned, the number of parade participants grew to 2,000 and the number of spectators was estimated at 20,000. Any child could enter and march as long as flowers predominated the decoration of their cycles, buggies, floats, pets, etc. By 1964, the local newspaper solicited extra flowers from readers to help with the parade effort. Children gathered flowers from neighbors and nurseries all around the city. Participation was open to non-San Bruno residents but it was all about the children.

The 1956 parade was particularly exciting as a house caught fire along the parade route. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, "Fire trucks detoured 15 blocks to reach the blaze. When the marchers arrived, fire hoses were lying across their path. But the happy, not to say dazed children, dragging their flower-banked fairy-tale vehicles, forged serenely ahead, into the swirling smoke, onward and into the sunlight again....It took an hour passing the judges stand."

By 1957, the workload of producing the parade was so great the Optimists were getting assistance from other chapters throughout the Bay Area. But 1968 was a dark year in the annals of the event. The sponsoring Optimists canceled the event due to "a lack of manpower." The next year, the Optimists got offers

of help to stage the parade. By 1984, the Lions took over sponsorship.

Newspaper photos of the parade over the last 30 years show a wondrous, sometimes whimsical, display of floats, some quite elaborate. The space race influenced entries in the 1960s. In 1962, a prize went to a floral Aurora rocket built by Cub Pack 271 and the Division 6 winner was the William Tieken family's flowering flying saucer.

As the parade continued through the 1970s, more marching bands from around the area came to strut their stuff down San Mateo Avenue. Excellent bands from Capuchino and Crestmoor High Schools, the San Bruno Park School District, Parkside Junior High, and Laguna Salada School District represented the City's educational institutions. Also appearing over the years were bands from schools in South San Francisco and San Mateo.

In 1982, San Bruno born entertainer Suzanne Somers returned to town to join Mayor Bob Marshall as a co-grand marshal. Throngs of spectators showed up to see the hometown girl who made it big in Hollywood. Her family home had been right along the parade route, so from ages 3 to 14, she either marched in or viewed the parade. She said, "...it's such a wonderful effort to bring the community together; it's just a real nice event for the town to get involved in, especially in this age when people are isolated from each other."

Former parade participant Jennifer Gravem, now grown and an educator, was pictured in 1983's *San Bruno Herald* coverage dressed in a polka-dot clown suit, waving from her flower-bedecked tricycle. Jennifer noted, "It's wonderful for a community to be brought together on a happy occasion, for it seems that in this world today, we only unite for tragedy. The Posy Parade is the opposite. I was able to be a part of my community and have fun with old friends as well as make new ones that lived just around the corner."

In 1989, the 49th parade was a celebration of San Bruno's 75th anniversary of incorporation. The parade procession time, which had dwindled over the years,

increased to 2 hours of floats, classic cars, dignitaries, and, of course, children. San Bruno's 1914 Parade Queen Edith Cook, smiled and waved to onlookers from the back of a convertible. A host of past and present mayors, Council members, City staff and prominent citizens joined in the celebration and the floral decorations (albeit mostly artificial) once again made the Posy Parade true to its name.

In the last 20 years, the parade's look has greatly altered. Division 1 now consists of "sports" teams that are allowed to march without any decoration. By 1999, there were only 3 decorated carriage/buggy entries and only 2 cart/wagon entries. *The Independent* newspaper still called the event "a floral parade for boys and girls" but there was hardly a flower in sight.

San Bruno's Centennial celebration has renewed interest in the City's unique civic event. The 2014 parade brought back more familiar faces and community pride. Hopefully, the City's claim to fame will grow again in popularity and participation and San Bruno's Posy Parade will live on and prosper.



Posy Parade float from 2014. Courtesy San Bruno Library.

Maryanne Dornlas

Maryanne Dornlas has lived in San Bruno since 1956 and was educated at San Bruno schools until attending the University of San Francisco. She retired in 2005 after at 31 year career at the San Bruno Public Library as the Circulation Services Manager. She's been happily married to husband Dave for 37 years.



**San Mateo County
Historical Association**

2200 Broadway
Redwood City, CA 94063
650.299.0104
www.historysmc.org

Summer 2014

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Redwood City, CA
Permit No. 277

Change Service Requested

**San Mateo County
History Museum
and Archives**

650.299.0104

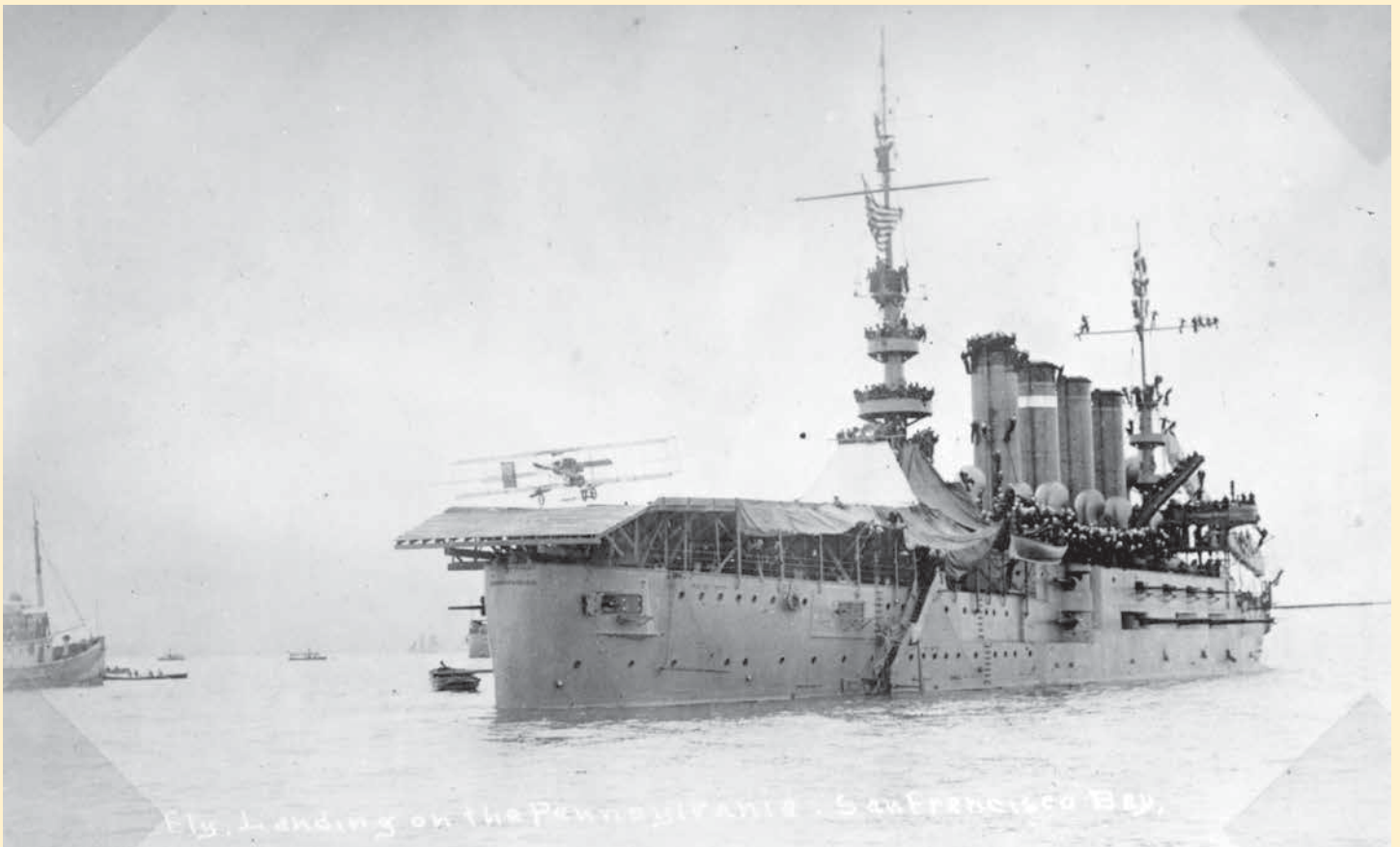
Sanchez Adobe

650.359.1462

Woodside Store

650.851.7615

La Peninsula



On January 15, 1911, Eugene Ely took off from Tanforan and landed on the *USS Pennsylvania*. It was the first time a plane landed on a ship.