

THE ALPINE SUN SHOPPER – December 6, 2007
Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society

ALPINE'S TOWN HALL/WOMAN'S CLUB—AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The following piece was written by Joan G. Manuele in June of 1999 in recognition of the centennial celebration of Alpine's Town Hall. It is an autobiography—the Town Hall telling Joan about its century of existence. The building now belongs to the Alpine Woman's Club and with the recent Woman's Club Holiday Home Tour and the ongoing Capital Investment Drive (CID), it seemed appropriate to share this beautiful and historical article once again. Perhaps the pictures the article paints will make you feel the history of Alpine more strongly when you next step into this beautiful old building. It certainly does that for me.

“Here I stand in the heart of Alpine with a century of history and memories held within my stately walls. Built in 1899 with money raised by a group of benevolent townspeople and matched by Mr. Benjamin Arnold, I have witnessed more than most living beings.

I have heard the bell in my old bell tower ring out to assemble the few but concerned residents to take part in lively and sometimes heated discussions regarding early community problems...or to call churchgoers to worship...sometimes to peal mournfully for funerals held here. I've heard it clang urgently to summon help to fight fires...and I still hear its peal, slightly softened by distance, as it again calls the congregation together at the Community Church where it was moved, just across Victoria Drive. Later I heard the more raucous clanging of the fire bell. A large iron ring suspended near the trees out front which called members of the Volunteer Fire Department to fight numerous and sometimes tragic fires. At other times that loud clanging was merely the work of young pranksters who just couldn't resist that big iron temptation!

Was that an earthquake I felt, or just the rumbling overhead of a spirited meeting of the Boy's Club in my attic room so many years ago? I've heard and I've felt the happy feet of young and old dancing across my floor to the sounds of a Virginia Reel or Strauss Waltz...the Two Steppers and Jitterbugs and now the ever-so-energetic limbs of the karate students.

I've heard countless youngsters performing on my stage...musicians, budding thespians, the early Harmonica Bands of Hazel Hohanshelt...and others, anxiously awaiting the strains of “Pomp and Circumstance” as they marched across my stage to receive their graduation diplomas. The whirr of a movie projector, too, was heard when they decided to entertain the local citizenry here, to save them the long ride “down the hill.”

I've heard the clip clop of horses and stagecoach teams...the rattle of “Tin Lizzies” and Model T's...and later the roar of 1940's mufflers and motorcycles...the sounds of delivery wagons and shoppers at the general store and busy citizens hurrying for their mail at the post office just across the road...sounds always changing, always increasing as the town around me grew.

I've felt the emotions of young people passing by me...young people going off to war—not once—but twice and more...soldiers driving through our village while youngsters clambered up into the big oak tree, to watch and wave. I've also heard the sobs of loved ones when some of the young men did not return.

I have heard the gavel pound for Town Hall and Ladies Aid Society meetings, and then in 1914, for the small but stalwart beginnings of this Woman's Club...first as the A.B.C. Club, later called the Monte Viejas Club and finally, in 1927, the present day Alpine Woman's Club. At first the women were simply striving to “civilize” a rural populace by bringing music and some culture to the area...and always offering a meeting place for ever-widening community interests. Bandages were rolled and socks knitted for the war effort...P.T.A. meetings were held and I housed the beginnings of the local library where the

minds of young and old could expand. Every manner of community gathering has taken place within my walls.

Month after month I've heard the cheerful voices of the women here working to provide the funding for many youth activities and for scholarships, as well as for other local charities. I've heard the sound of feet...treading up my stairs to purchase items at the Antique Attic and rumblings deep inside me as items stored in my basement are hauled up for rummage sales...and the clatter from my kitchen as food is prepared for all manner of events to entertain and raise the needed funds.

I have watched my village grow from one of dusty or muddy roads...of small stores, gas stations...vineyards and all sorts of fruit orchards...beehives and flocks of sheep and horses—many horses for work or transportation or even just for fun! All these changing to paved roads and traffic lights, ever expanding businesses and always a growing population.

But through it all I have remained strong and only slightly altered. My bell tower and flagpole are gone and I no longer look out on a “comfort station,” once so sorely needed by weary travelers. These dedicated women, together with other clubs and members of the community, have provided well for me throughout the years. From indoor plumbing and water, a kitchen and “necessary room,” heating and fans and beautifying me with curtains and paint, a brick patio, planter boxes and flowers. Local school children crafted three wonderful murals to highlight my gardens and planted an herb garden...while others maintain with caring hands the work already done. Now the women are busy surrounding me with plantings, memorial rose and iris gardens while most recently I've heard the harsher sounds of carpentry tools used to construct a beautiful gazebo and other machinery needed to add a well and a new driveway and resurface the parking area. I feel the love of so many who have worked to restore and maintain my brilliance.

Yes, I feel brilliant because I know how many things that I have helped to teach this community. Pride in a heritage. Unity in a common purpose...and the love of many selfless people who have strived through the years to keep me well and handsome. I could name so very many who have contributed their time, money and special talents but, suffice to say that ALL who have helped in any manner are equally responsible for the fact that I am still here after 100 years! MAY IT EVER BE SO!”

You can help ensure that it will always be so by contacting Margaret Smith at 659-0050 or Ann Hill at 445-4235 to purchase a CID tile which will forever be a part of the building and Alpine's history.

Carol Walker and her husband Paul lived in Alpine for 19 years. Carol is the Membership Chairman of the Alpine Historical Society. She can be reached at cwalker@alpinehistory.org or 858-384-2546.