

Supplemental information: Buena Vista Club House

1. How and why was the Buena Vista Civic Improvement Club created?

The Buena Vista Civic Improvement Club (Club) was formed and organized on February 27, 1923 by forty-five (45) residents who had a desire to improve their neighborhood. Prior to the late 1920's, the area now known as Buena Vista was named "Kansas City". The neighborhood was located from Jackson to Division Streets and from 14th to 18th Streets. The area was in need of street lighting, improved streets, and a connection across the canyon at Madison Street. The existing bridge was unsafe and there was no way for residents of the "Kansas City" area to get around their neighborhood and no access to downtown Oregon City. One of their first order of business was to rename the neighborhood from Kansas City to Buena Vista.

The neighbors banded together to determine what they could do to affect change in the under developed portion of northeast Oregon City. The residents met at the home of Mr. and Mrs Anton Naterlin in January of 1923. The initial goals of the club were as follows:

- Street improvements- new bridge across the Madison Street canyon;
- Clean neighborhood & downtown streets
- Better street lightening;
- Improved sewer connections;
- Neighborhood park
- Add more shade trees; and
- Improved street signage.

One of the first project of the Club was to get the city road commission (on November 21, 1925 meeting) to approve an expenditure of \$5,000 for the purchase and maintenance of a street flusher to clean the downtown and neighborhood streets. At the same meeting they put forth a program providing for the construction of a new and greatly needed bridge. The second big project was the purchase of a 23-acre tract of land at 16th and Jackson Street to establish a park and playground. Families in the area wanted to see a park on the property.

BY June of 1923, about 100 people belong to the Club.

2. Who belonged to the Club? Were they well known citizens of the community?

Organizers and members included:

- Ella & Anton Naterlin- it was in their home that the first organizing meeting was held; 1422 Madison Street (designated landmark). Anton worked for Hawley Pulp and Paper Company
- A.J. & Anna Lewis- AJ was the first Club president, charter members;

1619 Harrison Street

- Kathryn Vonderahe Carothers & Chester Carothers- She was the first Club secretary and treasurer; charter members; Chester worked for Portland Traction Company; 1616 Jackson Street. As of the 1982 inventory Kathryn (Kate) was still living there. She is the daughter of Henry Vonderahe, one of Oregon City premier builders (designated landmark)
- Dr. Mabel Hardenbrook, local dentist and one of the original founders of the Club-; 1602 Jackson Street (designated landmark). Dr Hardenbrook office was in the US National Bank building on Main Street
- Eric & Mary Hedlund- charter members; he worked for Crown Willamette Paper Company; 1501 15th Street
- Doris & Charles A. Thorpe- He worked for Western Machine Corporation; 1714 16th Street
- Jack & Mary Charriere- charter members; he worked for Crown Willamette Paper Company; 1508 16th Street
- Arch & Leona Phillips- he was employed by Crown Willamette Paper Company; she was active in the club; 16th and Division Street
- Jack (John) Drumm, second Club president; - 1405 Division Street
- Fred & Nell Wiley- last Club president 1982 to 1985-she was a clerk at the Oregon City Woolen Mills Company and he was a salesman for Wardrobe Cleaners- 514 Pleasant Avenue
- Bessie Anderson- charter member
- Bernetta Hedlund Nicholas- member; daughter of Eric & Mary Hedlund 511 15th Street
- Mike & Julia Long- charter member & renovated the donated building so it could be used as the Club house- he was a cement man; 1307 15th Street
- George Pursefull- charter member & renovated the donated building to be used as the Club house by members
- Florence and Kenneth Kerns- he was employed as a hardware clerk at Fredrich's Hardware; she was a clerk at Vic's Variety Store, 1810 14th Street
- Agnes & Bert Morgan- member- 404 Washington Street (designated landmark)
- Vera Marshall- member- 1510 Taylor Street
- Charles Scharbach- member; 18th and Division Streets
- Mrs. David Bradley- member
- Donald and Dolores Ireland- he was an employee of Crown Zellerbach Corporation, she is a clerk at Oregon City Hardware- 507 Abernethy Road

Club officers:

- 1923: AJ Lewis, president; Kate Vonderahe Carothers, secretary/treasurer
1923-28: Jack (John) Drumm, president
1941: William J. Croner, president; Mary Charriere, secretary
WJ & Myrtle Croner lived at 1817 12th Street
1987- Nell Wiley- last club president

The members of the Buena Vista Improvement Club were members of the Oregon City Community at large. Regular working class residents who saw a need to have improvements made in their neighborhood.

The men and women of the neighborhood worked at the Woolen Mills, Crown Willamette Mills and Hawley Pulp and Paper and stay at home mothers. The exception being Dr. Mabel Hardenbrook who was one of the first women dentist in Oregon City. They all had one thing in common, a desire to improve their neighborhood. It is a very early example of citizen involvement where residents came together to solve a problem and “they rolled up their shirt sleeves” and got to work. They identified a community problem and became part of the solution by raising funds and contributing to their neighborhood and city as a whole

3. How did the Club contribute to the development of the city, neighborhood?

The group raised funds to purchase a street cleaner for the city to help improve the appearance of city streets. Their next project, a year in the making, was to raise funds to purchase land in the neighborhood for a park. The first funds were from small donations and fundraising by holding dinners, card parties, dances and donation from business firms and the local Kiwanis Club.

The park, Atkinson Memorial Park, was named for Reverend George H. Atkinson, who organized the first Congregational church in the northwest. The Club purchase of the property included a portion of land that was once owned by Reverend Atkinson. The families in the area wanted a park and playground. The group also moved a couple of small buildings to Atkinson Park. It was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Surfus. The building was originally located behind Huntly –Draper Drug Store located at 7th And Center Streets. The building was renovated by Mike Long and George Pursefull.

The Club was truly a grassroots organization and a classic example of citizen involvement. The efforts of the Buena Vista Improvement Club are an example of how a few civic minded citizens can have a profound and lasting effort on Oregon City. They identified a problem and took steps to solve it.

In addition to the projects listed above, the Club also sponsored activities for the youth of the community including the Buena Vista Boys band and the Junior Stamp Club.

4. What activities happened at the Club, were they political, social or leisure?

The initial goal of the Club was to bring improvements to their section of Oregon City. They started out by attending a meeting of the city road committee. They went there to request improvements- cleaner streets, a new bridge across Madison Street and street lightening. They raised money to buy a park and gave it to the City. The Club created programs and activities for the area children.

The Club was active from 1923 to 1987.

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The Club used the building to hold their membership meetings. The Club also held fundraisers social activities that included dances. There were also the headquarters for youth activities: stamp club and several boy band groups. Relatives and friends of Club members were allowed to rent the clubhouse for parties and receptions. The Buena Vista Club house was the center of the social fabric of the neighborhood.

The July 1924 dedication celebration of Atkinson Memorial Park was a day to remember. Jack Drumm, club president, presented the “keys to the park” to Mayor William Andresen. Noted author, Eva Emery Dye spoke on the life of Reverend George Atkinson. The Club organized a parade and musical numbers for the day’s festivities. A local girl was named Miss Liberty and she led the buglers in the procession.

5. How did this Club connect to the larger themes of Oregon City’s context statement?

The Buena Vista Improvement Club came into existence in a very progressive time in Oregon City’s history. Parts of Oregon City were improved during the progressive era of the city’s growth and development. Electric lights and many of the city’s streets were paved and improved. New community improvements included a new highway, a new grade school m swimming pool and other street and highway improvement. Much of these improvements came to fruition because of federal funds. However, the Buena Vista area of Oregon City was largely untouched by any progress. The formation of the Club coincided with Oregon City’s motor age. After the members of the Club petitioned the road committee, improvements were made not only to the Buena Vista neighborhood, but with the purchase of the street cleaner other area of Oregon City were a lot cleaner.

The Buena Vista neighborhood became a booming area and was described by the Morning Enterprise as “the busiest growing place in Clackamas County”.

In conclusion, the Buena Vista Improvement Club contributed to the health and vitality of Oregon City for over 64 years. The following quote fits the Club:

Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead

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