

New century brought new freedoms

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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The first few decades of the 20th century brought much change. One aspect was the greater freedom women gained in their personal lives.

Education opportunities opened up for them, working outside their homes became more acceptable. In 1920, they finally gained their right to vote in the United States. Even clothing styles adapted to this new-found freedom, with looser cut garments and shorter hemlines.

It is during this period that, for the first time, a larger number of young women decided to pursue their education and work rather than concentrate on getting married and starting a family.

The advent of automobiles added to this feeling of freedom. Suddenly destinations that were difficult or impossible to reach by trains and busses could be accessed by car. Former day trips now became afternoon excursions. By the 1930s, Vacaville area residents were travelling far and wide. Looking at records, diary entries and souvenirs of the time gives us a glimpse of how eagerly local residents were to explore their country.

One of these was Edith Harbison, who remained an avid traveler throughout her life. A familiar sight around Vacaville in her car, she explored throughout the western United States, keeping detailed records of her trips, both in writing and in photographs.

In April 1939, at age 51, she undertook a driving vacation with a friend, Mrs. Kuhlmann, visiting Death Valley, Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam, Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon, Salt Lake City and Sun Valley. The roads in those days were not always quite as well maintained as they are today. On her way through Death Valley, she wrote on April 20: "On the way to Scotty's and Ubehebe Crater (famous sights in the valley) the road crosses the gullies of a wash and so is full of "dips" & "rises" like the track of a roller coaster. So one must keep one eye out for "dips" or it may be too bad, but they are a thrill when one learns to take them! ... We did not take the Artist's Drive or see Golden Canyon, Devil's Golf Course, or Bad Water because the road had been freshly oiled this morning."

The travelers left at 5:45 the next morning to escape the hot temperatures in the valley. "We went out by way of Beatty thru Daylight Pass. No one at the check station. Honked

my horn and a man in a nearby cabin sat up in bed and waved us on.”

Organized roadside help was not common yet, and travelers often had to help each other out. “We arrived at Las Vegas before the natives were up. Went some 30 miles out from Las Vegas, battling along at 47 miles per hour and raving about the grand road. My car began to weave and I heard an unusual sound. Coming to a stop, I found I had my first flat tire in all my years of driving. I got my spare out first and was looking for a place to put my jack when a young couple from Ohio came along. He insisted that he could change it easier than we could find a 3A Station and he had it changed in a very few minutes. She pushed me aside, saying that I was not dressed to change a tire & got her hands plenty dirty.”

Though by today’s standards, they had not been on the road all that long, the car needed regular maintenance. Edith records on the same day that “I was ready for oil change and grease job at 10,100 miles and I rolled into a Standard Station at Boulder City with my meter reading just that. How was that for luck?”

The two friends reached the Grand Canyon safely on April 23, amid a real snowstorm, settled into a cabin at the Bright Angel Lodge and set out to explore for the next few days. On her first day, Edith heard the ranger talk about the three-day mule trips down into the Canyon and “I heard him both times, but let it go in one ear and out the other. However, it was a little slow going out the other ear tonite....” She changed her reservations to include the three-day trip and set out down the Kaibat trail the following day. “We had our pictures taken and then set out - I on “Slippers,” Mr. Diggs on “Spooky,” and our guide, “Stiffie” on “Eddie.”

“All the way down, our mules had insisted on walking on the very outside edge of the trail, as I have seen horses do before. I don’t mind it for I like to look over and down too, But Mr. Diggs was not always happy about it. He questioned Stiffie and was told if they walked next to the bank, they would skin their knees on the rocks. There are two points on the Kaibat Trail called “poison points” because of the sheer drop into the canyon. At these points, the mules all hung their heads over and paused a second to take a look, to my delight & Mr. Diggs’ consternation. He turned his head each time & looked at the bank & I laughed.”

She had a full day to explore the different valleys around the Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the canyon before the mules took the little group back up again.

Reunited with her friend, Edith and Mrs. Kuhlmann left the following day for Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon. Once again, on May 3, the car needed to be greased, after only 1,000 miles of driving.

A day in Salt Lake City found them exploring the city and the Mormon Temple Square, before they set out for their return trip through Nevada. Finally, on May 8, they reached Vacaville again. "Arrived home at 11:30 and we both agreed it was a perfect trip in every way. We have food for thought and books to study for a long time to come. The souvenirs I always bring home are books of the country I have visited. I hope we can again go somewhere together."

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