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THE FAMOUS FIESTA DE LAS ROSAS OF THE 30's/

Preface

This is a record of my personal experiences during Santa Clara County's 6th Annual Fiesta de las Rosas in San Jose.

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Events leading up to and including the Queen's Coronation, and the climax of the Floral Parade.

Sources

My own experience and newspaper articles in the San Jose Mercury Herald of April 29, May 3, 10, 15 and 17, 1931 and the San Francisco Examiner May 7, 1931. Letters from the Committee chairmen.

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THE FAMOUS FIESTA DE LAS ROSAS OF THE 30's

I was eighteen when I was chosen to be Miss Mountain View for Santa Clara County's sixth Annual Fiesta de Las Rosas celebration in San Jose. According to the San Jose Mercury Herald I was "The only blond entrant in the Fiesta Queen contest, unanimously selected by prominent representatives of civic organizations and service clubs. She is an honor student in Art at the Mountain View High School and has a high degree of talent, according to her teachers. Her blond tresses are unbobbed." Needless to say I was overwhelmed and excited before and during the events that ensued for the following several weeks.

First of all I received a congratulatory letter dated April 29, 1931 from Mr. Phil Riley, chairman of the Queen Committee announcing the program for the important ceremony to take place on Saturday evening May 2. The Fiesta Queen would be selected from the twelve contestants residing in the Santa Clara Valley communities of Willow Glen, Campbell, Palo Alto, Los Altos, Saratoga, Mountain View, Cupertino, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, Morgan Hill, Los Gatos and Gilroy. We were invited with our chaperones to a special dinner in the Esplendido Cafe of the then sumptuous Hotel Sainte Claire. The judges and the Queen Committee would also be there.

"You will spend the hour before dinner in the Lounge Room for picture taking and introductions," the letter said. "after a special dinner in your honor, the selection ceremony will take place, also in the Lounge Room where the announcement of Her Royal Highness of the 1931 Fiesta de Las Rosas Queen will be

made. The official Fiesta costumer will take measurements of all candidates for their Fiesta costumes. Regarding your dress for the occasion, it is up to you. Look your prettiest!"

The big evening was just two days away. What would I wear? I decided on my nile green formal that I had made for my High School graduation.

As we arrived we were each presented with a corsage of roses and our Official Fiesta Ribbon that was pinned diagonally across our chests.

The tables set for about five hundred people were beautifully decorated with tall yellow tapers, yellow roses and ferns. A "Queen's cake" also decorated with yellow roses occupied the center of the main table, having been prepared especially for the occasion through the courtesy of Tom Cain, manager of the Langendorf Bakery, and a member of the Fiesta Committee. We girls were all too excited to think about food.

After dinner we assembled in the Lounge Room where a platform had been prepared with gold ferneries filled with beautiful long stemmed roses and immense wreaths of roses hung from two pillars on either side of the platform, adding to the effectiveness of the setting.

Music for the ceremony was furnished by an orchestra from the Fox California Theatre through the courtesy of the manager.

It seemed to take forever but finally the announcement came. Her Royal Highness, Queen of the 1931 Fiesta de las Rosas would be Miss Leonora Kirby of Morgan Hill. Queen Leonora was then officially congratulated by the chairman of the Queen Committee.

We were all very happy for her and looking forward to the exciting events to come, in which we would all participate.

The official Fiesta costumer then took measurements of all

the candidates for our Fiesta costumes. Mine was to be gold satin with a scoop neckline, puffed sleeves, a bouffant skirt and a matching lace mantilla held high by a Spanish comb. I would be a Spanish Senorita!

The following Wednesday May 6th had been named Fiesta de las Rosas Day in San Francisco and elaborate arrangements were made by the Queen Committee to entertain us at various functions. Automobiles were provided and we rode together to San Francisco where we presented Mayor Rossi with a key to the city of San Jose and officially invited him to the Fiesta de las Rosas,

At noon we were the guests of the Junior Chamber of Commerce at the Commercial Club, and later went for fittings of our Fiesta costumes to the theatrical costumers Goldstein & Co. on Market Street. The gowns that we would wear at all official activities were furnished by the Fiesta Committee.

Later that afternoon we were guests of the once famous Fox Theatre on Market Street. For the evening, the management of the Hotel St. Francis had invited us to a dinner dance and provided rooms for us to change to evening dresses. I wore a predominantly green print chiffon, and felt like a princess.

We were assured that escorts would not be needed since the Fiesta Committee would be in constant attendance. It was a gala affair with Phil Harriss' orchestra providing the music. Just being at the St. Francis for an evening amidst all the color and the lights and the music was a great thrill for an eighteen year old. The committee also provided transportation back to our homes after this exciting day.

The morning of Wednesday May 13th we had our first rehearsal for the coronation ceremony at the Fox California Theatre in San Jose and the following day at noon another rehearsal.

Early that same evening we made an appearance and assisted at the opening of the Fiesta Flower Show at the Pichetti Auto salon on Market Street, where we were introduced to our much admired Governor Rolph, who shook our hands and spoke to each of us.

The show according to experts would have done credit to any city in the country. Exhibits were many and varied and of high quality throughout. Particularly lovely were roses shown by members of the Santa Clara County Rose Society. Mrs. Fremont Older, Rose Society official was chairman of the Fiesta flower show committee.

We again went to the St. Claire Hotel to prepare for the elaborate coronation ceremony at the Fox Theatre.

A festive atmosphere set the scene for the ceremony. When the curtain went up, two caballeros in colorful Spanish costume sang "Everybody loves Carmelita" accompanied by a guitar. While they were singing the chorus, Ruthadelle Roberts in a multicolored Spanish dancing dress strolled in from the other side of the stage and gave an exceptionally pretty and graceful Spanish dance. Then two young ladies wearing embroidered Spanish shawls sang "Barita" a serenade to the Queen.

Two little heralds in white satin and gold came to either side of the stage and blew a fanfare on long trumpets. At this signal the orchestra took up the stately strains of "Pomp and Circumstance" and the court procession started down the aisle from the theatre lobby. To this day whenever I hear "Pomp and Circumstance" I am reminded of that fabulous evening.

We the ladies of Queen Leonora's court led the procession by twos in our lovely shimmering satin Spanish Costumes of pastel shades with matching lace mantillas. We carried bouquets

of roses and were followed by the crown bearers in pale blue, holding a white satin pillow on which sparkled the jeweled crown. Behind the crown bearer came the sceptre bearer also in pale blue. Then two little flower girls dressed in gold, carrying baskets from which they scattered rose petals in the path of the Queen. Hail! the Queen. Queen Leonora came next in white satin embroidered in gold, with pearls and brilliants and wearing a regal court train of crimson velvet edged with ermine that was carried by four little pages dressed in pale green satin.

Prolonged applause greeted Queen Leonora as she ascended the stage. When his excellency Governor James Rolph entered from the wings a moment later he was given a great ovation which held up the ceremony for a time.

"Subjects of the realm of Santa Clara", he began, "in selecting your Queen you have chosen wisely and well. Hark ye, Hark ye, Hark ye! It is by Royal decree that I as Governor of the commonwealth of California have the honor and destination of placing the crown of jewels upon the worthy brow of Queen Leonora. Subjects of Her Majesty the Queen, will you rise as I place the crown on the brow of Her Majesty Queen Leonora and wish her a happy and prosperous reign."

Tremendous applause followed the placing of the crown. Then Governor Rolph and Phil Riley assisted her majesty to her throne and stood beside her.

The final tableau with the Queen seated on her throne surrounded by her maids of honor, with Governor Rolph and Phil Riley on either side of her was an impressive one, and was the signal for a tremendous outburst of applause as the curtain slowly descended.

The following evening, May 15th we all attended a Fiesta Pageant at Theodore Roosevelt High School grounds after earlier again making an appearance at the Flower Show.

On Saturday May 16th came the climax of all the Fiesta festivities. The three mile long Grand Floral Parade led by San Francisco's genial mayor Angelo Rossi on horseback, as Grand Marshall, a courtly cavalier.

Although Governor Rolph was delayed in Sacramento and did not reach San Jose in time for the parade, it did not lack a governor. Fred Balzar, chief executive of Nevada rode in a car piloted by George Olsen Jr., formerly of Reno.

We the ladies of the court rode with the Queen on the official Fiesta Association float, described as a "Floral creation from Fairyland." Queen Leonora Kirby of Morgan Hill was seated on a throne of roses and sweet peas with a balcony of roses behind her. Joined by festoons of sweet peas and roses, court ladies formed in a line on either side of the 36 foot floral dominion of the Queen.

In front of the Queen was maid of honor, Miss Mountain View, Elfriede Koenig. Ladies of the court along either side were Miss Palo Alto, Corinne Elkins; Miss Sunnyvale, Irene Vergin; Miss Los Altos, Phyllis Steffan; Miss Santa Clara, Josephine Conner; Miss Saratoga, Eugenie Rispaud; Miss Los Gatos, Bryce McClendon; Miss Cupertino, Elizabeth Craft; Miss Campbell, Thelma Brooks; Miss Willow Glen, Doris Francis; and Miss Gilroy, Nellie Alice Jones.

It was great fun wearing our beautiful costumes, sitting amidst the roses and sweet peas and waving at the hundreds of thousands of applauding people. But I regretted not being able to see the rest of the forty three beautifully decorated

floats depicting "Historical Events" the theme of the parade. I also missed hearing the scores of marching bands and seeing the clowns, the school children, the many saddle horses and decorated autos.

There were entries from Pasadena, San Francisco, Palo Alto, Santa Cruz, Fresno, Salinas, Sunnyvale, and Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs and of course the Shriners and other service clubs.

Prizes went to the following:

The San Jose Soroptomist Club won the coveted Grand Sweepstakes Award with it's Iron Horse, a radiant replica of an old locomotive in the Stanford Museum, done in white carnations trimmed with marigolds. In the cab rode two pensioned railroaders, D.H. Bair who was engineer of the original Governor Stanford Locomotive in 1879 and L.E. Wilson who fired under Bair in 1896. The name "Governor Stanford" and "No. 1" on the side of the cab were in blue cornflowers.

Second Prize went to The Kiwanis Club for it's replica of Horses and covered wagon in yellow and gold marigolds. One horse wounded with an arrow, apparently falling to the ground. The wagon was done in white statice, with wheels of red carnations and yellow and blue irises at the base.

The Rotary Club won the third prize "Round the World with Rotary", depicting a globe seven feet in diameter revolving 16 revolutions a minute. A zeppelin in white carnations revolved around the globe 25 revolutions a minute. The base of the globe in salmon gladiolas and the lettering worked out in pink roses and carnations completed the picture.

Honorable Mention went to the City of Pasadena for it's 55 foot long Colonial Barge having a base of huckleberry and asparagus fern. On the deck of gladiolas was a large canopy

of lavender sweet peas and pink roses. Colonial lanterns hung from four corners of the canopy. Fore and aft were bowers of roses. The prow was of lavender sweet peas and pink roses with doves on either side. Pasadena sent L. J. Goodman here to build the float.

The City and County of San Francisco also received Honorable Mention. Their's was a huge 63 foot float representing the Discovery of Alaska with realistic bears of white carnations and pansy shading, emerging from the water. One bear held a fish in it's mouth. In the center was an igloo of white carnations, outlined in blue delphiniums. Alongside ran a dog team with loaded sled made of red roses, geraniums and marigold harness and vari colored roses for packages. The aurora borealis was made of twenty shades of sweet peas, pansies, delphiniums and red and Pernet yellow roses. Northern lights splashed in the background in riotous color. Icy rays of white carnations spread far over the sides of the float.

The San Jose schools prepared one of the largest and most beautiful floats (not in competition) entitled "California Gold." It had a gold stamp mill of old sea moss, nestled in the hollow of a meadow. From a large Cornucopia, California fruits and flowers poured in blue and gold of poppies, larkspur and marigolds.

Among other exceptional floats was the Sunnyvale schools and Chamber of Commerce, showing the Sunnyvale air base (now known as Moffett Field) with a huge hanger of white carnations trimmed with red, and windows of purple statice. The doors were open and a Zeppelin of silver dusty miller leaves, was half emerged. Turf was brake fern. The float itself was a mass of boxwood and Russell roses. On each side, lettered in

white carnations was "Navy West Coast Air Base--Sunnyvale".

Mountain View Schools called their float "Entrance to United States Naval Dirigible Base" in red roses with pillars of ivy and greens. Lettering showed name of base and Mountain View. Around the entrance were grouped students.

The City of Palo Alto with a symbolic Redwood tree, the trunk composed of white sweet peas with branches of red gladiolas, forming the colors of Stanford University. Underneath the tree was a wigwam of roses and deep pink gladiolas. The base was of boxwood and Russell roses, with lettering in red and white carnations.

The City of San Jose was a conventional replica of the bear flag. A golden bear done in marigolds stood on a green base. Design was worked out in white pampas plumes and white sweet peas. The title, "California Republic" was done in blue cornflowers, red geraniums with a fringe of green.

The float of Veterans of Foreign Wars titled "Aviation" showed a globe with an airplane circling around it. Globe had a map of California in marigolds. The plane was red geraniums with wings of carnations and trimmings of blue statice. Lettering was in white carnations.

The crowd liked this parade--"The best yet" was the general opinion.

That evening we visited the Flower Show for the last time before our final dinner dance (this time with an escort of our choice) at the Hotel Sainte Claire.

The glamour was over but the memory lingers on.