

Flora Reynolds

1866 — 1958

(Widow of T.H. Reynolds)

Flora Buckbee Reynolds was born February 19, 1866, in Quincey, the fourth child of a pioneering California family. The family didn't stay long in Plumas County as an 1870 census lists the Buckbee family as living in San Francisco. We don't know much about Flora's childhood or her marriage, only that she became a strong and determined woman.

The 1900 Federal Census states that Flora has been married 12 years to Thomas H. Reynolds, they live in their own mortgaged home in the "Eastland Village" part of the Sausalito Township, (Mill Valley had yet to be incorporated into its own town). She has borne two children, but now has only one living child, Ruth. Thomas' occupation is listed as "cashier".



Flora Reynolds, 1904

We also know that by 1902, Flora was a recent widow, tasked with administering her late husband's estate. Multiple legal notices appearing in the local papers for years afterwards suggest that her job was complicated. Nevertheless busy family demands did not keep her from participating in her community. In 1898 during the Spanish American War, Flora was the first president of the Mill Valley chapter of the Red Cross. She remained active in the Red Cross for years, serving as its secretary in 1917. She was also not too busy to join with her neighbors in August 1902 to become a founding member of The Outdoor Art Club. She stayed active and was elected by the membership in 1904 as our second President, the first to preside in our new Maybeck-designed clubhouse. However, we assume that Flora still needed to earn a living but few jobs outside the home were available and competition for them was probably rather fierce as suggested in a short notice in the March 1905 Sausalito News: "*Mrs. Flora B. Reynolds has just received the appointment of postmistress at Mill Valley after a hard and stubborn fight with several others who were looking for the office. Mrs. Reynolds is an estimable woman and well entitled to the position. She has many friends in this county, and several of them worked hard to secure the appointment for her. Mr. W.J. Martin, who is an old friend of Mrs. Reynolds' late husband, was one of her chief supporters, and much credit for her victory is due to him. Mr. Martin was manager of the Western Union Telegraph when Tom Reynolds was an operator.*" In his book, Barry Spitz says that due to her gender, this appointment was "mildly unusual." Flora remained Mill Valley's postmistress until 1925. Her annual salary was \$2,300.

By late 1915, Flora was nearly 50 years old and we assume enjoyed reflecting and writing about her reflections, those of someone who clearly had been here at our town's beginning. In November 1915, the Mill Valley Record published her piece headlined "*A Reminiscence. — A pioneer? Well, yes, compared to a large proportion of the present residents of Mill Valley; and, like all other early settlers, we had many experiences peculiar to all first families forming new communities. For several years, our school consisted of but one teacher, and a second one was secured only after a rigid canvassing of all parts of Mill Valley to eke out enough children to guarantee a sufficient number for an assistant.*"

"There were then but two churches, but when a third one was proposed, members from both of these gave their time and encouragement; for the Valley was like one big family — each anxious to help his brother. Few residents lingered longer than four or five of the summer months; but with three flourishing hotels sending their busses to meet the train, and with many private carriages, the station in the afternoon presented a scene of much life and color."

“The little village of Eastland had no direct train service at night. Only by riding on the San Rafael train to Alto, and driving from there in buses, could we reach our homes after dark. (Unless, as often happened, the bus driver overslept and neglected to meet us as we alighted from the train, when the fate of walking home awaited us). The post office occupied a corner about six by eight feet in the general merchandise store — presided over by one of the first settlers.



Flora Reynolds, 1916

We had, of course, the railroad telegraph, but the luxury of a telephone or electric light service was unknown to us. Candles and coal oil were our only means of lighting for many years, and every family had its supply of lanterns to carry, if desirous of taking a trip out after dark, for, of course, there were no street lights. There was no crooked railway winding its way to the top of Tamalpais, but every moonlight night the trails were thickly peopled with parties walking to the summit of our beloved mountain to view the wonderful panorama and see the moon or sun rise over our beautiful bay lying peacefully in the east. For those who felt unequal to walking the distance, there was always a large supply of burros to choose from. Where our public square is now located was at that time a large, oval garden plot, filled with bright-colored flowers, in the center of which played continually a fountain—always a restful sight on warm days.

Nature had been most generous to this little tract of land. Growing right at our own door were wild flowers in profusion, as well as wild berries and shrubs. It was no uncommon sight to see quail and deer and rabbits from our windows. But as man has encroached —these have become rarer as have also the coons, mountain lions, wild cats and rattlers.”

The image here is cropped from a 1916 photo taken of the cast of an original OAC production titled *“Shakespeare Redivivus”*, a light bit of vaudeville where 18 women each took the part of a female character in one of Shakespeare’s plays. Here we see Flora as Kate in *“Taming of the Shrew”*, an independent woman of strong opinions, one who lives her life without much need for men.

Flora Reynolds was Mill Valley’s postmistress for twenty years, and later worked as a librarian in the Mill Valley’s Carnegie library. Beginning in 1911, daughter Ruth worked with her mother at the post office. Flora and her family initially lived on Bigelow Avenue in a Klyce-built house. In her later years, Flora lived on Oakdale Avenue with her daughter Ruth. Flora Buckbee Reynolds continued to live in Mill Valley for the rest of her life, dying in 1958 at age 92.

FLORA B. REYNOLDS

In the next installment of the OAC Serial, **“The 35 Ladies Project”**, you will meet another Founder whose family business still competes with that of Levi Strauss.