

GRAND FAIR OF THE LADIES' CHRISTIAN COMMISSION — August 1864

From a picture owned by the California Historical Society.

Women in War-Time, San Francisco, 1864

The Ladies' Christian Commission Fair

By DOROTHY H. HUGGINS

IN the rooms of the California Historical Society, half-way up the stairway leading to the second floor, hangs a picture, unmarked except for the name of the donor — Mrs. Silas H. Palmer. When Mrs. Palmer made the gift to the Society, a few years ago, even she did not know what it was intended to represent; and it was not until the writer was preparing some footnotes for "Some Letters of William S. Jewett, California Artist," edited by Elliot Evans, for the September 1944 issue of this *QUARTERLY* that the scene was identified. The picture portrays a gathering of people, apparently a fair or bazaar, which, judging from the costumes and other *prima facie* evidence, took place during the Civil War period. But there is nothing to indicate in what hall or for what purpose the group assembled.

The heads of the people evidently are genuine photographs, the figures and background were drawn with a brush, and the whole then photographed in sepia tones. The result, a group picture of about 16 by 20 inches in size, is reproduced here. Jewett, himself, may have sketched the figures and the background, for he took an active part in the arrangements for the fair and mentions it in his letters. His portrait may be found near the center of the group. And perhaps some of our readers, with keen eyes or a magnifying glass, will discover their parents or grandparents, or even great grandparents if the family album is still extant, among the "fashion and beauty" depicted here.

The Nation was in the midst of war, in the fall of 1864. No swing bands and glamorous moving picture actresses stimulated the sale of Victory bonds at huge rallies. No nylon hose and electric refrigerators were awarded as prizes to bond purchasers. But a mammoth cheese, exhibited at the Mechanics' Industrial Fair in San Francisco and sold at \$1.00 a pound, brought in \$2,820 for the United States Sanitary Commission, forerunner of the American Red Cross; and in Nevada, a sack of flour, auctioned and reaucted, is said to have raised for the Commission \$275,000.

There were no women welders, nor burners, nor riveters; no WACS, no WAVES, no lady Marines, no Red Cross Motor Corps of women drivers, no Blood Donor Center, no Stage Door Canteen, and no U. S. O. Hospitality House, in Civil War days. Women in uniform were not to be seen. And as for slacks or dungarees — even Mrs. Bloomer would have been shocked at the sight of female limbs clad in garments so revealing. But hearts no less patriotic than those of today beat beneath the ruffled bosoms of eighty-one years ago; and many-petticoated ladies in floor-length dresses, at home and in church gatherings, thought up innumerable ways to

contribute to the comfort and welfare of the sick and wounded. They put finishing touches to their water-color paintings, hand-embroidered pin-cushions, silk patchwork quilts, and crocheted antimacassars, and planned fairs and bazaars at which to sell them for the benefit of the current cause.

In August 1864 the women of the churches of the San Francisco Bay region centered their efforts on a "Grand Fair of the Ladies' Christian Commission, for the Benefit of Our Sick and Wounded Soldiers and Sailors."

Beginning on August 16 and running through the first week in September, an advertisement in the San Francisco newspapers announced that the Fair would be held in Union Hall, commencing August 24, and that the ladies respectfully solicited "donations of money and all kinds of saleable articles, from all who sympathize with our suffering heroes." The California Steam Navigation Company and the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad Company would carry all packages intended for the Christian Commission free of charge, and the railroad would give "a reduction on its regular prices to those who visit the city to attend the Fair."

Stores may be sent to Ludlum & Clark, New Orleans Warehouse, corner of California and Davis streets. Money, to the Treasurer, Mrs. Gladwin, 335 Jessie street, or to Mrs. S. M. Bowman, Pres't, Occidental Hotel.

The resources and appliances which the Ladies have in hand, will enable them to make their Fair the most attractive ever held on this coast.

In the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, on August 19, a "card" signed by Mesdames S. M. Bowman, A. J. Donner, Charles Keeny, S. H. Harmon, A. A. Ritchie, S. B. Stoddard, and E. Thomas, denied emphatically that "through any action of the Ladies' Christian Commission any have been excluded from participating" and appealed to "all persons without distinction of name and creed . . . to unite with them in making the Fair a grand and glorious success." And on the 22nd the *Bulletin* announced that:

This benevolent enterprise . . . will open on Wednesday next, at Union Hall, on Howard street. The proprietors of the Hall have given it to the ladies free of charge . . . The internal arrangements and decorations are now being completed under the direction of S. C. Bugbee & Son, Architects, who volunteer their services. Col. Drumm [Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Drum, Assistant Adjutant General and Chief of Staff] has kindly furnished 100 American flags to be used for decorative purposes . . .

On its first page the *Daily Alta California* that same morning had reported that:

. . . extensive preparations [are] being made by the managers, assisted by the volunteer efforts of upwards of three hundred ladies of this city . . . The Hall will be most tastefully decorated with floral wreaths, garlands and National emblems, and a number of the finest paintings and works of art from the private galleries and collections of our wealthy citizens, have been kindly loaned . . . Very many elegant and curious creations from the fair hands that have been employed for weeks past in this labor of love and patriotism, will be on exhibition, and for sale, and very many of the beautiful creators,

themselves, will be in attendance for the purpose of making the necessary negotiations relative to the rates of exchange between nick-nacks and gold and greenbacks. The musical portion of the programme has been placed entirely under the direction of Prof. Gustave Scott, who has entered upon the arduous duty with his characteristic spirit and enthusiasm . . . A series of concerts and *tableaux vivants* have been arranged to be given on alternate evenings . . . The following artistes, comprising the best musical talent in the city, have already volunteered their services: Signor and Signora Bianchi, Miss Jennie Kempton, Mesdames Marriner, Shattuck, Louisa Grotjan, Taylor, Wiley, Misses Tourney, Freeman, Cameron, Doyle, Maury, Van Vleck, and Messrs. Seguin, Elliott, Russell, Campbell, Crowley, Wunderlich, Pique, Smith, Anderson and Swift. The following bands have volunteered: The Presidio, or Ninth U. S. Infantry, Union, Chris Andres', Chas. Alper's, and Fuller & Sanders'. Mr. Frank Lawlor has also volunteered his services and will deliver the popular recitation of "Shamus O'Brien." . . .

On the day of the opening, August 24, the *Bulletin* gave considerable space to a description of the hall:

. . . The Hall is a fine one for the purpose. It is 91 feet 4 inches wide by 117 feet long, clear of the rostrum; and its length, including the rostrum and front rooms, is 153 feet. The ceiling is 31 feet high. At the front end, over the entrances, is a commodious gallery. This gallery, the wall in rear of it, and the windows and doorways, are tastefully draped with the stars and stripes. The rostrum has been converted into a stage, for the oratorical, musical and dramatic exercises. In the centre of the hall stands a beautiful floral temple about 25 feet high, fashioned like a temple of liberty, made of evergreens, trimmed with flowers, surmounted by a gilt eagle, and tended by rosy cheeks and bright eyes.

On each side of the hall and at the ends are built light and graceful alcoves, consisting of arches draped with "old glory," surmounted in front and centre with crosses, eagles, shields, arms, mottoes, etc. No. 1 of these alcoves, which are all intended for the sale of the articles contributed for that purpose, is to be occupied by the ladies from Oakland. No. 2, by Miss Baker and her school, of this city. No. 3, which is the centre alcove on the left side, will be occupied by members of Dr. [Charles] Wadsworth's and Dr. [William C.] Anderson's Churches (Presbyterian); No. 4 is erected by the Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians from Santa Clara; No. 5, by the United Methodists of San Francisco; No. 6, by the Congregationalists; No. 7 (which is the centre alcove on the right side), by the Episcopalians; No. 8, by the members of the Rev. Mr. [Abbott E.] Kittredge's congregation [Howard Street Presbyterian]; No. 9 and 10, by the Baptists. . . . There are various other alcoves in the corners and at the ends of the hall. In one, "the old woman's shoe" . . . In another there will be a soda fountain . . . Other alcoves will contain gentlemen's furnishing goods, and sewing machines from the rival firms of Grover & Baker and Wheeler & Wilson.

A grand piano will stand under the centre of the rostrum. At the right hand corner, on entering, "Jacob's Well" is to be kept filled with lemonade, and tended by Rebecca in the costume of her people. In the opposite corner is a grotto made of sheeting, painted in chilling imitation of stone, wherein some rosy anchorite intends to retail ice cream. . . . The Hall will be illuminated by 8 gas chandeliers of 21 globe lights each, and one grand centre chandelier of 48 globe lights, suspended from the ceiling, and by 12 side chandeliers of two globe lights each. The 12 panels in the walls will each contain a mirror 5 by 8 feet in dimensions. . . . The front rooms are fitted up as an art gallery. . . . Above these rooms is an apartment over 90 feet long and perhaps 20 wide, which is to be used as a refreshment room, where the lady managers of the different alcoves will spread tables with all the most appetizing eatables and drinkables . . .

The next evening the *Bulletin* again polished up its best adjectives:

The Ladies' Christian Commission Fair was formally opened last evening... one of the brightest and pleasantest scenes ever witnessed in San Francisco. The gaily beflagged alcoves [were] decked out with all sorts of women's handiwork, with vases of flowers... with pictures in oil... with a thousand curious and useful articles, offered for sale in the holiest of causes by tender-hearted women who looked proud and glad in their novel vocation, chosen for the nonce in behalf of the suffering Union soldier and the cause which was typified by the cross uplifted above them and mingled with the starry banner of the Republic... The evening was warm, but the exercises were short, and the crowd was not wearied by long keeping still at the sound of words which the most of them could not plainly hear. The Presidio Band struck up a series of martial airs by way of overture. Mayor [Henry P.] Coon... made a short address in explanation of the object of the Christian Commission and of the Fair... William H. L. Barnes followed the Mayor... He advised the ladies to charge the highest prices and give back no change. Our men are not drafted for the war, but let their purses be conscripted forever... The chairmen announced that the Fair was now opened... and while the "Euterpeans" sang a song the audience began to move round the Hall... A floral temple, with its sweet wealth of roses and its heaped baskets of fruit, attended by half a dozen or more of irresistible clerks in crinoline, was the centre of attraction. "Jacob's Well" was surrounded by a crowd of thirsty wayfarers, who kept white-robed Rebecca busy dipping her pitcher and filling the outheld cups. The grotto, with its aquarium, its stalactites and its big shells... did not realize its promise of ice-cream, but the soda fountain did a brisk business...

The most satisfactory sights to many were in the art gallery and museum. The former contains 40 or 50 oil paintings, and drawings of various sorts... There are several copies of old pictures, Madonnas, Magdalenes, dead Christs, etc.,... Butman contributes several fine California landscapes, the best being a view of Mount Shasta... A cabinet in an adjoining room contains a vigorous original drawing by Reubens... A glass case at the end of this apartment is filled with relics of the war—rebel buttons, belts and buckles, bullets, fragments of shell, ... gathered from the wreck of every battlefield from the first Bull Run to Missionary Ridge. On the wall are hung a variety of... objects—an autograph letter of George Washington;... a shot-pouch that once belonged to Kit Carson... The skin of the dog Lazarus is there, stuffed by the taxidermist's skill to such a life-like look that it would drive Bummer and Montgomery street wild with joy...

The number of visitors was probably not less than 3,000. The receipts of the evening were \$1,111.05, about \$600 being taken at the door... The exercises this evening will consist of music and tableaux. The names of the tableaux are as follows: 1. Spirit of '76; 2. Pin Money and Needle Money; 3. Statuary—Faith, Hope and Charity; 4. Queen of Sheba at the Court of Solomon; 5. Inconvenience of Single Life; 6. Statuary—Dante and Beatrice. Day visitors may be interested to know that luncheon is spread from 12 to 2 o'clock. Tickets 50 cents each.

On the 26th the *Bulletin* reported "a larger throng of visitation" on the preceding evening than on the opening night:

...A fine band was stationed in the gallery (which is decorated with great taste, presenting a pleasant relief to the moving throng below)... The gas was partly shut off several times for the tableaux, causing a succession of rushes from the side rooms... Some of these tableaux as "The Spirit of '76" and "Faith, Hope and Charity," the latter a representation of statuary—were very good. The last one, "Queen of Sheba

before Solomon," didn't "get sot," as the Yankees say, and the costume was scarcely more ancient than the time of Richard III. The curtains did not come together at the sound of the bell, and a great laugh was raised by the figures skedaddling in full view of the audience.... No raffling is permitted,... but gift subscriptions are quite numerous.... A large silk quilt, representing the flags of all nations... is to be presented to President Lincoln. An embroidered quilt, with military emblems, is to be presented to Butler, Grant or Hooker — "whichever has the largest vote...." A handsome cabinet-cased sewing machine is to be presented to Mrs. Starr King.

Among the innumerable gifts to the Fair are some of great interest and value. W. B. Glaser contributes a dead pigeon, carved from a solid piece of maple... P[eter] Toft gives a sepia drawing of a natural bridge on the coast near Santa Cruz....

The "grab bag," the "royal wedding" show, and the "skating pond" draw a good many quarters out of willing pockets. The skating pond is really a very ingenious and beautiful piece of mechanism and art. It consists of a polished marble tablet, on which a number of small figures are represented in every attitude of skating. A crank keeps them in motion, and an ingenious and deceptive arrangement of mirrors multiplies them indefinitely....

Mr. Cummings exhibits... a bunch of 50 pears, growing on a stem only 8 inches long and weighing 19 pounds, which was picked in Briggs's orchard near Marysville.... F. P. Medina brings down from San Andreas a droll little automaton man, who holds out his hand for a quarter, and nods his thanks when he gets it. This was exhibited at the San Andreas Fourth of July Sanitary Fair....

...E. W. Perry, an artist of this city, gives a small oil painting of Mount Diablo at sunset.... V. M. Williams, also of this city, gives an oil sketch of Oak Knoll, in Napa Valley, the beautiful home of the lamented Osborne. T[homas] Hill, another San Francisco artist, offers a cool Sierra Nevada lake scene, with Indians in the foreground and a snowpeak in the distance.... Butman donates his careful study of "Chaparral in the Coast Range"....

Among the new pictures loaned for the exhibition are two small Yosemite sketches in oil, by the masterly hand of [Albert] Bierstadt.... A rich golden moonlight scene, in oil, by Jacobson attracts much admiration. Jewett, who painted the fine portrait of Gen. Sutter which hangs in the State Capitol, contributes two large views of Yosemite waterfalls....

The Alta California, on the 27th, was most enthusiastic:

The Fair at Union Hall is crowded every evening by the youth and style of San Francisco, or at least by that portion belonging to the Evangelical Churches. Though very few Catholics, Unitarians, or Jews, are to be seen, still there is a brilliant assemblage of toilets and pretty faces; and indeed nowhere in the city at present can an evening be spent more agreeably, or can a better view be obtained of the fashionable people of the city. It would be invidious to say which alcove, and which church, has the most beautiful faces among its saleswomen; such comparisons are odious, unless made to a single confidante. The chief attraction belonging to the Fair is the fair sex.... There is a magnificent silk quilt, made in patchwork to resemble the flags of all nations. There is another silk quilt, made of six dozen patches, each about ten inches square, each braided with an elegant or unique cushion pattern. This quilt, marked by Mrs. Hendricks, and embroidered by the ladies of the Second Baptist Church, is considered a work of art in its way. It is to be presented to the General who receives the greatest number of votes, and every person can vote who pays a dollar.... A patent glass ballot box receives the votes.... The picture gallery contains some very good pictures, and among them Williams' "Roman Pilgrims" and Perry's "Inquisitive Cham-

bermaid" attract attention immediately. The bronzes, brought from Japan by Mr. Blake, are well worth seeing. There are other wonderful things innumerable. . . .

The fair closed on the evening of September 8. The programme was printed in the advertising columns of both the *Alta California* and the *Bulletin*, and the news columns of the latter announced:

... There will be an auction sale of the following paintings and engravings, which were donated for the benefit of the Christian Commission: Oak Knoll, by Virgil M. Williams; Mount Diablo, by E. Wood Perry, Jr.; Lake Tahoe, by T. Hill; Landscape, by a lady; A Run for Life, by W. S. Jewett; Scene on Walker's River, by G. I. Denny; Scene from Newport, by Mrs. W. G. Badger; Chaparral in the Coast Range, by F. A. Butman; ... a Moss Picture.

Besides these there will be sold several aquaria, a set of Russian sables, and many articles of less value. After the auction, the Fair will wind up with a grand promenade concert. . . .

The *Bulletin*, on September 9, reported that there had been a "big turnout" on the final evening, and that "the attendance was never larger" — a feather in the bonnet for the ladies, for the *Alta* stated that the "attendance at the Mechanics' Institute Industrial Fair yesterday, was greater than on any previous day since the opening" (September 3); and two political mass meetings — a "Copperhead" gathering in Portsmouth Square and one sponsored by the Union League in Platt's Hall — had likewise drawn large crowds. The opera, theatres, and concerts also were "in full blast."

"The swells of music and the other swells," punned the *Bulletin*, "subsided about 9 o'clock, and Mr. Badger began the auction sale." Among the many "items of interest" offered, a "wreath of moss collected from the battlefield of Gettysburg," framed by Miss Barnes, was sold to Mr. Pillsbury for \$45. An engraving of a "Hunting Scene," contributed by Mrs. Edward Bosqui, brought \$10. And a "Splendid Fruit Cake," that had already raised \$322 at San Jose for the Sanitary Commission, was sold to William Sherman for \$10, resold to Mrs. Pixley for \$5.00, and sold again for \$2.00. From neither newspaper are we able to learn which general was to be surprised with the gift of the silk patchwork quilt. At the close of the sale, the Reverend G. J. Mingins (of the First Presbyterian Church) "made some appropriate remarks."

The total receipts of the Fair, according to the *Bulletin*, were "between \$23,000 and \$24,000; and the net receipts will probably be over \$20,000 in coin. . . . Some of the fixtures and decorations will be taken to Sacramento, where the ladies are about to start another Fair on behalf of the Christian Commission."

"On the whole," the paper added, "the ladies who originated and carried out the late Fair have reason to be proud of the result and can remember it with unalloyed satisfaction for the rest of their days."











