

history

Women of the Santa Cruz Mountains Sara Bard Field Joan Barriga

Josephine McCracken demonstrated that women could exert influence on legislative bodies to enact worthwhile laws if they could get public support for their cause, but until the second decade of the 20th century, women had no real voice in the government, because they were denied the right to vote.

Steps to correct this inequity were made by the first Women Voter's Convention, at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. Twelve western states had already granted the right to vote to their female residents by 1915. Western women were determined to bring this message to the women in the East. In fact, they intended to take their message directly to President Woodrow Wilson.

The moving force behind this crusade was a woman named Alice Paul. During the Exposition, she and her followers collected enough signatures supporting women's suffrage to fill a petition more than 18,000 feet long. She sent her emissaries across the country by automobile (unheard-of in 1915). The crusading ladies would make speeches in cities and towns along the way and add more signatures to the petition, which would then be presented to the President in Washington, D. C.

Two women were selected to represent the Women Voter's Convention: Frances



Sara Bard Field

Joliffe and Sara Bard Field. These two women would drive cross-country in a massive Overland automobile driven by two Swedish ladies who wanted to get their newly acquired automobile back home to Providence, Rhode Island. They generously agreed to take the two extra passengers along. After a jubilant send-off in San Francisco, the Overland headed north to Sacramento.

In 1915, the only cross-country road was the so-called Lincoln Highway, which was not much better than a wagon trail. There were few road maps, no gas stations along the "highway," and no motels. By the time the Overland reached Sacramento, Frances



Joliffe had become ill and reluctantly dropped out of the great adventure.

Sara may have had second thoughts, too. She wasn't sure how she had ended up in the big car with two strangers who barely spoke English, driving across the United States. After all, she was a poet, not a speechmaker, and now the responsibility for the success or failure of the crusade for voting rights rested on her.

As the car turned east toward Reno, Sara had time to think about those last hectic days before the departure. There were the tearful good-byes to her two children, Albert and Catherine, who were living with her divorced husband, Rev. Albert Erghott, in Berkeley. And there was the good-bye to Charles Wood, a distinguished lawyer in Portland, Oregon, who was the reason for her divorce.

When Charles heard of the impending trip he left his law office to see her off in San





Sara Bard Field portrait

Francisco. He brought with him a perfect gift—a heavy robe of buffalo fur.

It would have been even more comforting to have Charles along on the trip. He had campaigned in the West during the Indian Wars and was familiar with much of the country they would be passing through, but the trip had been publicized as a women's crusade. That left no room for a male passenger. In addition, Sara had too much pride and determination to admit her anxiety about this long trip with two strangers. Her concerns proved to be well-justified. The journey would take over two months and cover 5,000 miles.

They were east of Reno in the Great American Desert, as it was then called, when Miss Kinstedt began complaining about the "unaccustomed servitude of her role." She resented the fact that Sara got more attention when they arrived in a town, because Sara made the speeches. The driver, Miss Kindborg, tried to smooth things over, but Miss Kinstedt kept muttering to herself in Swedish and throwing dark looks at Sara.

In Wyoming, they had to push the car through snowdrifts. In Kansas, the Overland dropped into a deep mud-hole. It was towed out by an amazed farmer and his team of horses. His comment about three women attempting to cross the United States in an automobile in the dead of winter: "Well, you girls got guts."

At one point during the long trip, Miss Kinstedt turned to Sara, riding in the back seat, and said, "At the end of this trip I'm

going to kill you!" Many people on long trips have probably felt the strain of being at close quarters with a fellow-traveler who grated on their nerves, but there was something about Miss Kinstedt's tone, and the gleam in her eyes, that gave Sara a distinct chill. Not even the warmth of Charles' buffalo robe could dispel it. Not until the trip ended did Sara find out that Miss Kinstedt had been a patient in a mental institution. In her enthusiasm over getting the crusade launched, Alice Paul hadn't investigated the backgrounds of the two generous ladies.

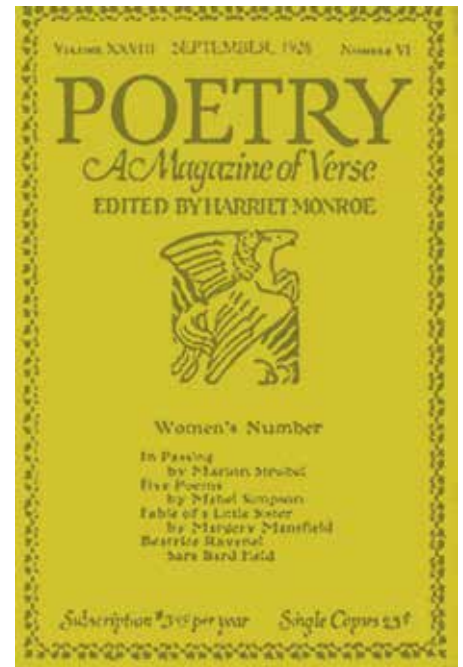
Sara had one traveling suit. When it needed to be cleaned, the dusty travelers had to stay an extra day in town. Sara made good use of that time by making speeches about granting women the right to vote, collecting signatures for the petition, and meeting dignitaries.

When the battered Overland finally reached Washington in December, Frances Joliffe—happily recovered from her sudden illness—met them for the parade to the White House. She had made the journey by train.

President Wilson, amazed at the length of the petition when it was unrolled in the East Room, promised to support their cause. He kept his word, but it took three more years



Celebrating life in the Santa Cruz Mountains



before Congress passed the amendment. In 1920, women in the United States finally had the right to vote in the Presidential election. Sara Bard Field must have had a sense of great accomplishment for her part in the women's suffrage movement.

After the great crusade was over, Sara returned to California and continued writing poetry. Her first book of poetry, *The Pale Woman*, was published in 1927. Five years later, the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco presented her with a gold medal for another work, *Barrabas*.

Charles Wood gave up his Portland law practice in 1919, to devote himself to Sara and his own writing. They built a home up a wooded canyon just south of Los Gatos, which they called "Poet's Canyon." It overlooked Los Gatos Creek and the new highway leading to Santa Cruz. Sara loved the solitude of their home, as well as the stimulating times when they entertained other artists and writers. She and Charles often spend evenings walking in the garden, where he enjoyed identifying the plants and explaining the uses of the many herbs that he cultivated. Together they planned a pair of statues to be placed at the entrance to Poet's Canyon. Sculptor Robert Paine created "The Cats" who took their place on either side of the gateway, a symbol of grace and dignity to everyone passing them on the way into the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Sara Bard Field lived in our mountains. She made a significant contribution to woman's rights and our democracy. Thank you, Sara.