CALIFORNIA’S CHAUTAUQUA READING CIRCLES

During the late 19th and into the 20th century, the Pacific Coast Branch of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle provided the citizens of California the opportunity to acquire a college level education at a very minimal expense, through the Chautauqua correspondence reading program. Those who were members of the Chautauqua program could choose to either study the reading material on their own, or join with their local CLSC reading circles, many of which had been established in both rural and urban communities throughout the State.

Published in the Werner’s Directory of Elocutionists, Readers, Lecturers and other Public Instructors and Entertainers (1887),¹ were the names and locations of sixty-seven known California Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles that had been established within the first six years of the introduction of the Chautauqua program to the State. The authors who compiled this list of California’s Chautauqua Circles provided the following qualifying statement: *It has been impossible to get a complete list of C. L. S. C’s. Many of the Circles have no special names. When a place has more than one Circle, the names of the Circles are separated by a semicolon (;).*
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According to Reverend Thomas Filben, then pastor of the Bush Street Methodist Episcopal Church of San Francisco, by the year 1890, there were fifteen Chautauqua Circles in San Francisco, with a total of 300 members. Reverend Filben count of fifteen Circles in the city suggests that the number of reading groups had doubled in just three or four years, when compared to the list published in Werner's Directory of Elocutionists.

During the last decades of the 19th century, with a similar rapidity as that of San Francisco, an untold number of Circles were established throughout the state of California. These Chautauqua Circles were organized through their own initiative, with many being sponsored by the local churches, schools, or Young Men’s Christian Associations (YMCA's), with each organization providing the individual Circles, meeting space in their church parlors, school rooms and conference halls.

For example, the Central Chautauqua Circle of San Francisco met at Central Methodist Episcopalian Church; the Chautauqua Circle of San Francisco held its meetings at the Calvary Presbyterian Church; the San Francisco’s Westminster Circle met in the lecture-room of the Methodist Episcopal Church South; the Boulder Creek Circle met at the Presbyterian Church in Boulder Creek; the Sacramento members of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle held meeting at the city’s Presbyterian Church; and the Oakland Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle held meetings at the Young Men's Christian Association Hall.

In the greater Los Angeles area, the Epworth Chautauqua Circle held meetings at the home of their leader, Miss H. B. Freeman; the Union Chautauqua Circle held its meetings at the YMCA hall; the Delphi Chautauqua Circle was often hosted at Mrs. Stanton's residence, and the Marengo Avenue Chautauqua Circle met regularly at the home of Mr. and Mrs. W. N. Van Nuys.

These local Chautauqua Circle gatherings provided an opportunity to discuss and review the required literature each member was to have read privately. Beyond this directed activity associated with the required reading, these Circles developed and dis-
cussed additional interests related to literature, science and the arts. For example, many independent Chautauqua Circles explored further the humanities of higher literature with readings and discussions of the works of Bryant, Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Shakespeare, and Thoreau. As such, it became common practice amongst the Chautauqua Society, at large, to celebrate the birthdays of these Romantic poets with a program specifically directed toward exploring their works.

Such a celebration held at the Bush Street Methodist Episcopal Church was described by the *San Francisco Call* in 1891 as follows: *Henry W. Longfellow: Birthday Celebration by a Chautauqua Circle. Notwithstanding the forbidding weather, an interested audience assembled at the Bush-Street M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] Church last evening to celebrate, by an appropriate programme excellently rendered, the anniversary of the birth of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The occasion was in pursuance of the custom of the Chautauqua Society, of which those present composed a chapter, of remembering the birth of all leading poets and literates at the recurrence of their anniversary.*

For the Long Beach Chautauqua Circle, the members selected each week, one poet or other literary figure to be taken up and discussed as to his or her life and work. The program committee of the Long Beach Chautauqua Circle decided to enliven the exercises further by the introduction of novelties. For one such meeting, in February of 1894, the Long Beach Circles’ roll call was answered by quotations from the works of American romantic poet, journalist, and longtime editor of the *New York Evening Post*, William Cullen Bryant, for which nearly all the members responded from memory.

For the Marengo Avenue Chautauqua Circle, during the fall of 1896, subjects for discussion included, among other topics, “Growth of the American Nation,” “Growth of the French Nation” and “Catherine de Medici,” the Queen consort of France and wife of King Henry II of France. When the Marengo Avenue Chautauqua Circle met at the residence of Dr. J. S. White in the fall of 1900, as a part of the exercise, each member was asked to recite a quotation from the works of Fenelon, Pascal, Rousseau or Voltaire.
ATTENDANCE AT THE PACIFIC COAST ASSEMBLY

Attendance at the summer program of the Pacific Coast Assembly grew in numbers in just a few years after its being established. The first Chautauqua Assembly of 1880 in Pacific Grove drew over 500 participants. As the number of Chautauqua Reading Circles established throughout California increased, so to did the number of participants attending the summer Assembly in Pacific Grove. By the fourth Chautauqua Assembly of 1883, attendance had grown fourfold, as approximately 2000 participants tested the capacity of the retreat campgrounds to the limit. During the tenth Chautauqua Assembly of 1889, it was noted that nearly 4000 people were visiting the Grove daily, while for the eleventh Chautauqua Assembly of 1890, there was reported to have been between 4000 to 6000 people visiting the Grove, each day. By the year 1903, organizers of the twenty-fourth Chautauqua Assembly, planned for the reception of no less than 5000 daily participants. While the number of visitors continued to increase, it is important to note that a sizable percentage of those attending the Assembly during these years, were not Chautauqua members, as many attendees were simply drawn to the Grove for the variety of attractions and entertainment offered as a part of the two week program.
Pictured above is a large audience listening to the first Mayor of Pacific Grove, Dr. Oliver Smith Trimmer (circa 1900). Photograph Courtesy of Pacific Grove Natural History Museum.
MEMBERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC COAST BRANCH OF THE CSLC

At the end of its first year, membership in the Pacific Coast Branch of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, numbered about 700 students. Popularity of the Chautauqua program rapidly increased over the next six years and by the summer of 1886, it was reported that the Pacific Coast Branch of the CSLC had enrolled 3000 members, with the majority being residents of California. At the same time many more residents of the State participated as irregular members, enjoying the intellectual pleasure associated with attending the meetings of their local Chautauqua Circles. According to Andrew Rieser, author of book, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives and the Culture of Modern Liberalism*, the state of California, with greater than 1.5% of the population registered as members, was one of twelve States in the Union that had an exceptionally high rate of CLSC membership.
Graduation Ceremony for the Altrurians held in the Methodist-Episcopal Church and Assembly Hall in Pacific Grove, California. Photograph courtesy of Pacific Grove Natural History Museum.
RECOGNITION DAY

The activities associated with what was referred to as the Chautauqua Assembly's "Recognition Day" revolved around an often ornate ceremony for those Chautauquans who had enrolled in their local reading circle, followed the four years course of home study, and were now to be recognized for their accomplishments. On this day, graduating Chautauquans would stand and receive their honorary diplomas. The first of many elaborate graduation ceremonies to be held over the years at the Pacific Coast Assembly took place in 1883; a year when a total of forty students from the state of California graduated from the CLSC; nineteen of whom traveled to the Assembly to receive their diplomas.

A description of this decorative graduation ceremony was published in The Chautauquan, Volume 4 and reads as follows: The Pacific Grove Assembly, held near Monterey, California, devoted Friday, July 13, to the commencement exercises of the C. L. S. C. We give a full report of the celebration: Friday was a perfect Monterey day. The Chautauquans gathered according to program in the large public parlor of the railroad building and fell into line for a procession. The choir sang a cheerful Chautauqua song, in which many others joined, and then "processed." First came the president and officers of the society, then the graduates, then all members of the C. L. S. C. - then everybody. All members wore an oak leaf, which is the regulation badge, but members of the graduating class wore for a decoration a broad badge of dark garnet-colored ribbon, fringed with bullion, and with the unfailing "C. L. S. C." and the figures "1883" printed upon it in gold. They marched toward the Assembly Hall, passing under the motto inscribed and garlanded arches, and entering the building, proceeded to the front seats, which had been reserved. The hall, under the care of the decorative committee, had broken out into fresh verdure and bloom, while the letters "C. L. S. C." and the class dates, "1879-1883," had blossomed out in gold and scarlet upon the white wall behind the speakers' platform. The hall was full to overflowing. Everybody on the grounds had been invited to be present, and the greatest interest was manifested by all. The exercises began with an inspiring Chautauqua song. An earnest and appropriate prayer was offered by Rev. Dr. Heacock, of San Jose, and then a beautiful letter of greeting.
from Dr. Vincent, the founder of the society, was read. It was full of cordial friendliness, outlined briefly the benefits which he trusted all had received from pursuing the C. L. S. C. studies, and pointed out the catholicity and wide helpfulness of the Chautauqua Idea. It closed with words of stimulus and encouragement, as well as congratulation. Professor Norton now made a brief but admirable introductory address. He spoke of the Chautauqua enthusiasm and interest as an intellectual revival. It is a work for the masses, differing from that of the great universities of whose benefits only a few favored ones can avail themselves. It goes to homes of poverty, to workshops and kitchens as well as the libraries and parlors. It is food for the hungry wherever they may be. It comes to lives which have been arid and desolate through monotonous toil. He spoke of the great increase of insanity among our farming population, owing, no doubt, to the lack of healthful mental occupation. The C. L. S. C. course of reading and plans for neighborhood circles may help these lonely, overworked people to new and broader horizons of thought and life. Professor Norton closed with a pathetic and poetic comparison between our real lives and our temporary sojourn by the great sea which tosses and surges before us. Our footsteps on the shore here are washed away by every incoming tide, so with our "footsteps on the sands of time." The great sea of eternity will soon efface ill our little earthly deeds. Let us live for eternal things. Let to-day be a commencement indeed—a beginning of grander and better living, of deeds which shall survive in the long years of God.

The quartet choir sang another beautiful song, and then three essays were read from the graduates.

A delicate little prose-poem called "Childhood in Literature," by Miss Myrtie Hudson, of San Jose (a post-graduate of our society), was read by Miss Lydia Bean. The diplomas were presented by Dr. Stratton, who remarked when giving them that these diplomas do not confer degrees, but something better than a degree, for they represent mature study, habits of fixed thought and life-long intellectual growth.

There were more than forty C. L. S. C. graduates in our State this year. The following were present: Mrs. Lydia A. French, Stockton; Mrs. H. J. Gardener, Rio Vista; Miss E. A. Wood, Riverside; Mrs. A. J. Bennett, San Jose; Mrs. M. E. McCowen, Ukiah; Mrs. E. M. Reynolds, San Jose; Miss M. McBride, Dixon; Mrs. C. C. Minard, Evergreen; Mrs. Estelle Greathead, San Jose; Mrs. Lucy N. Crane, San Lorenzo; Mrs. S. E. Walton, Yuba City; Miss Cornelia Walker, San Jose; Mrs. S. F. Gos-
bey, Santa Clara; Mrs. F. W. Pond, Los Angeles; Miss Alice M. Wells, Dixon; Mrs. M. H. McKee, San Jose; Miss Henrietta Stone, Mrs. Mira E. Miller, Santa Barbara; Dr. C. C. Stratton, San Jose.

After the commencement exercises the crowd dispersed, and the friends of the graduates gathered around them to congratulate and exchange friendly greetings. But it was late lunchtime, and the keen demands of appetite were never keener than here at Pacific Grove. So, with the understanding that all were to reassemble at 2 o’clock p. m., those who had lingered hastened away. The hour for meeting soon arrived, and the Chautauquans mustered in force at the beautiful cove near Prospect Park. After a lively social time, President Stratton called the meeting to order and pointed out a suggestive-looking traveling photographer, armed with the usual camera and other implements, who had been hovering about a neighboring cliff, and evidently had intentions of immortalizing the C. L. S. C. Assembly. Everybody was requested to assume a graceful attitude and a pleased expression, which they made haste to do. The beach was covered with people, standing, sitting, reclining. It was very hard work to be sober and proper, and look as dignified as future ages will demand. Our president reclined upon the sand, as befitted "the noblest Roman of us all;" the secretary sat upright and faced the music; the modest vice-president tried to get away, but was restrained by his numerous admiring friends; the small boys in front were entreated to keep still; the photographer removed the pall-like black cloth, and the deed was done. The result was quite successful, and the picture may yet hang in the "Hall in the Grove," that eastern Chautauquans may see how their transcontinental comrades look when disporting themselves by the sunset sea.

The photograph business being disposed of, the next thing in order was the Round-Table. There was no table to speak of, but a great deal of "round"—an informal all 'round talk in a pleasant, familiar fashion. Everybody was seated upon the shining white sand, a soft gray sky overhead, a mild, warm atmosphere enfolding all, and the illimitable sea stretching out before us and breaking in soft murmurs at our feet. Members from all over the State gave, in brief conversational style, cheering reports of their various circles, and the utmost interest was manifested by all in the common weal. The tone of the meeting was decidedly inspiring, and all seemed ready to promise improvement and renewed effort. The next evening was the mussel-bake. A blazing fire had been built upon the sand, but far from the assemblage, and much vigorous muscle was displayed in stirring the embers and piling on driftwood and resin-
ous pine cones, but as to the mussels, perhaps the less said about them the better. There were, indeed, mussels baked, and they were passed around upon a board in the most approved style, but it must be confessed the supply was not very abundant. The whole mussel bake was a little like Hamlet, with the part of Hamlet left out. The explanation lay in the fact that mussels can only be gathered in certain places and at very low tide, and there had been a little misunderstanding. Nevertheless, brethren, we had a grand time, an unlimited supply of apples and freshly-roasted peanuts, and we fully propose to have a mussel-bake every year!

At a business meeting held during the assembly, Rev. Dr. Stratton was re-elected to the presidency of the Pacific Coast C. L. S. C. Dr. C. L. Anderson, of Santa Cruz, was elected vice president; Mrs. M. H. Field, of San Jose, general secretary and treasurer; Miss Mary Bowman, of San Jose, secretary of the Assembly, and Mrs. Eloise Dawson, of San Jose, treasurer of the Assembly. Votes of thanks were given to many benefactors and to retiring officers, especially to Miss M. E. B. Norton, who has given our Branch the most faithful and untiring service. Our newly elected executive committee consists of Rev. C. C. Stratton, D.D., San Jose, president; C. L. Anderson, M.D., vice-president, Santa Cruz; Mrs. M. H. Field, general secretary, San Jose; Mrs. Eloise Dawson, San Jose, treasurer; Rev. J. H. Wythe, D.D., Oakland; Professor H. B. Norton, San Jose; Rev. I. E. Dwinelle, Sacramento; G. M. Ames, Oakland; Miss Lucy Washburn, San Jose; Professor Josiah Keep, Alameda; Mrs. L. J. Nusbaum, Sacramento; Rev. C. D. Barrows, San Francisco; Mrs. S. E. Walton, Yuba City; Mrs. Julia Leal, Los Angeles; Mrs. E. M. McCowen, Ukiah; Clarke Whittier, M.D., Riverside; Mrs. E. A. Gibbs, Santa Rosa; Miss M. E. B. Norton, San Jose. 18
Chautauqua Mussel Bake at Moss Beach, Pacific Grove, California (1883). Photograph courtesy of California State Library, Sacramento, California.
Graduating class of Saratoga Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. Pacific Grove, 1890. Left To Right Front Row: Mr. Daniel McPherson, Mrs. D. McPherson, Mrs. Krick, Frank Cunningham, Miss Jennie Maclay, Miss Martha McPherson, Luther Cunningham. Left To Right Back Row: Miss Mollie L. Cunningham, Miss Louise Dale, Mr. James Fablinger, Miss Jennie M. Farwell, Miss Sadie Cunningham, Harry Warren.

Photograph courtesy of the Saratoga Historical Foundation and Saratoga History Museum.
A review of the list of students who participated in the graduating ceremonies of the Pacific Coast Assembly of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle reveals that women accounted for an exceptionally large percentage of those receiving honorary diplomas. The dominance of women attending and graduating from the Pacific Coast Branch of the CLSC was not unique to this particular daughter Chautauqua Assembly. During the summer school classes on the grounds of the mother Chautauqua in upstate New York, it was not uncommon for women to comprise as much as ninety five percent of the students. The reason for this high percentage of participation by ladies in the Chautauqua program was the result of the importance the Methodism put on women receiving an education. The Methodist church believed that a woman’s role was increasingly becoming one that established the educational and cultural values of the family. Thus, by providing women access to a college-level education, higher educational and cultural values would be extended to the family and the society as a whole. According to the Chautauqua records of membership, the principal constituency of the CLSC program was overwhelmingly American-born, Protestant, middle-class women of European descent; with membership in the program being ninety-nine percent Protestant and eighty-five percent female.

In the end, John Heyl Vincent’s establishing of the CLSC correspondence program provided the opportunity to obtain a college-level liberal arts education, at a very minimal expense, to thousands of people, particularly women, who would otherwise never been given such an opportunity. To what measurable degree the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Program provided an education to women in the United States, is offered with the fact that between the years 1882 and 1893, a total of 27,141 women graduated from the CLSC, while only 32,684 women graduated from all the colleges within the United States combined.

In the autumn of 1895, more than 6000 students on the Pacific Coast had enrolled in the CLSC program and committed themselves to the required readings outlined by the Chautauqua Institute. The opportunity to review as a group, the assigned home
reading material, was provided to these students through the established local Chautauqua reading circles throughout California. These Chautauqua reading circles organized in both rural and urban communities, prompted the formation of an untold number of California's women’s clubs, whose members were well versed in the scientific literature of Louis Agassiz, Joseph Le Conte, David Starr Jordan and John Muir and the Romantic literature of William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The formation of California's numerous independent women’s clubs quickly lent to the organizing of city, state and national “women’s club” coalitions, whose powerful alliances selected as their first political initiative - campaigns directed towards protecting the natural environment.24
It is the opinion of the writer [Jesse Lyman Hurlbut] that if one could ascertain the history of the woman's clubs that now cover the country, and ascertain their origin, it would be found that nearly all of the older woman's clubs arose out of Chautauqua Circles whose members, after completing the prescribed course, took up civics or politics, or literature. It would be an interesting study to ascertain how far the General of Women's Clubs of America was an outgrowth of the Chautauqua movement. (The Story of Chautauqua, by Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, 1921).

Echoing Jesse Lyman Hurlbut's comment relating to history of women's clubs, Andrew C. Rieser noted in his book, The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives and the Culture of Modern Liberalism, that beginning in the last decade of the 19th and into the 20th century, many of the CLSC reading circles were absorbed into the recently established local, civic-minded women’s clubs, a number of which were connected to their State affiliates, which, in turn were associated with the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC). Such was the case in San Jose, California, where the formation of numerous women’s clubs had resulted from the influence that had radiated from the Chautauqua Institute. The extent of the influence the Chautauqua Program had on the city is suggested by the fact that, during the 1890s, San Jose hosted as many women's clubs as any city of comparable size in the United States.

The San Jose Woman's Club (SJWC), the largest of the city's women's associations - had been established in 1894. As was the undertaking of many woman’s clubs established in America, the mission of the SJWC was to promote cooperation, good fellowship and relationships among the ladies of the city, and provide a center where questions of importance to the community could be openly discussed, and acted upon, with the goal of supporting the interests and well-being of all.
The organizing of Chautauqua Circles throughout the state of California seeded, not only the establishing of the San Jose Woman’s Club (SJWC) in 1894, but also the establishing of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs (CFWC) in 1900. The CFWC having been founded by, and elected as it first president, Mrs. Clara Bradley Burdette, the woman who had initiated the Women's Exchange in Los Angeles in 1886 and was active in organizing the Long Beach Chautauqua Association in 1887.29

Clara Bradley Burdette, was the wife of Robert J. Burdette, a pastor of the Pasadena Presbyterian Church and well known humorist speaker at lyceum gatherings. Mrs. Clara Burdette, herself, describes how she traveled to Northern California to support establishing of the Chautauqua Program as follows: As early as 1887 I came from Los Angeles to San Francisco to help form the old time Chautauqua Circles and following that I was definitely interested and active in the formative years of California's organized womanhood under its various phases of church, educational, philanthropic, eleemosynary and political development.30

In 1897, three years after its being established, the San Jose Woman’s Club (SJWC) joined the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC), and entering into the California Federation of Women’s Clubs (CFWC) in 1900. The first political campaigns for each of these three women’s clubs, began in 1900, with efforts of both the CFWC and GFWC directed toward protecting the Calaveras Big Trees, near Yosemite Valley, followed by SJWC efforts directed at protecting the redwood trees of Big Basin, located in the Santa Cruz Mountains.31 The San Jose Woman’s Club's initial involvement in protecting Big Basin quickly led to establishing of the Sempervirens Club, which in turn seeded, decades later, the establishing of the Save-The-Redwoods League.32

These earliest of forest advocacy efforts, protecting the Calaveras Big Trees, near Yosemite Valley, and redwood trees of Big Basin, taken up by the CFWC, the GFWC and the SJWC, were the first of their kind directed at protecting the redwood trees of California. These efforts mark the beginning of a Progressive Reform Movement that served to initiate the involvement of the Women’s Clubs throughout the State, lending their political support, for the protection of California’s natural resources.33
In February of 1902, the first convention of the California Federation of Women's Clubs was held in San Francisco. This convention provided yet another opportunity to gather the support of clubwomen for the promotion of forestry. Several paragraphs of a newspaper article, penned for The San Francisco Call, describe the meeting activities and give light to the emphasis placed on the topic of forest preservation during the convention:

*Mrs. J. G. Lemmon of Oakland reported for the committee on forestry. Mrs. Lemmon stated that the efforts of the committee had been directed to the dissemination of literature looking to forest preservation. Many books and pamphlets were sent out and a large number of tree seeds were distributed. She urged the women of the clubs to commence with tree planting in their towns and gradually extend the work and take more interest in Arbor day.*

"Forestry" was the subject of a paper read by Mrs. G. T. Greenleaf of Redlands. Mrs. Greenleaf favored governmental supervision over the forest question, tree planting and tree preservation. She likewise urged upon club women to use their best endeavors to get trees planted wherever and whenever, practicable. "Forests are the best irrigation enterprises that the State can know," she said. "The preservation of the trees is necessary to the preservation of the State." A special plea was made for the preservation of the big tree groves throughout the State.  

In the coming years, the summer gatherings of the Pacific Coast Assembly of the CSLC supported communication among the California Women’s Clubs. During the Assembly of 1907, a “Club Women’s Roundtable” was organized to provide an opportunity for the different clubs from around the State, to discuss their particular efforts and report the result of their activities. The following year, for the Pacific Coast Assembly of 1908, the organizers of the two-week program introduced, what were referred to as “Special Days.” On these days, the Assembly featured activities around a particular cause or subject, with one day being designated as Anti-Saloon Day, another Civic Righteousness Day, another Woman's Clubs Day, and another Forestry Day.  

During the Assembly of 1908, Mrs. G. T. Greenleaf, an active member of women's groups in Los Angeles, was the keynote speaker at Women’s Club Day. This speech
was followed by Mrs. Viola Price Franklin, President of the San Jose Woman’s Club, who conducted a “Club Woman’s Roundtable” devoted to the discussion of topics of interest to club women. Among the noted roundtable speakers that day were Mrs. James B. Hume, President of the California Federation of Women's Clubs and Mrs. Lovell [Laura] White, who served as the President of the California Club of San Francisco (1898-1902 and 1910-1911), and President of the Sempervirens Club (1903-1906). It had been Mrs. Laura White who was instrumental in the establishing of the Sempervirens Club, the organization responsible for preventing the Calaveras Grove of Big Trees from being logged; accomplished by gathering over a million signatures and submitting them to President Roosevelt.

For the Assembly of 1909, the speakers for the Woman’s Club Day included Mrs. James B. Hume, President and Mrs. J. W. Orr, Vice-President of California Federation of Women’s Clubs, and Mrs. Katherine T. Bingham of the San Jose Woman’s Club. The morning talks by these women speakers was then followed by a Women’s Club Forum Hour.

Just two weeks prior to the Pacific Coast Assembly of 1909, Monterey’s Hotel Del Monte hosted the annual meeting of the California Federation of Women's Clubs. A newspaper article that appeared in the Los Angeles Herald, on Sunday, May 23, 1909, provided the following information related to the meeting: Mrs. Lovell White of San Francisco addressed the meeting on the national forests and Mrs. Emily Hoppin on the state forests…. John Muir, the naturalist and author, talked to the federation on the mountains of the state and highly praised the beauties of the Hetch-Hetchy valley…. A resolution was adopted condemning San Francisco’s attempt to take the water supply of Hetch-Hetchy on the ground that it would mar a place of great beauty, whereas there were other places where water could be obtained.

A second newspaper article that appeared in the Oakland Tribune, on May 23, 1909 provided additional commentary related to Muir's talk to the California Federation of Women's Clubs at the Hotel Del Monte: The most interesting feature of the
day was a talk by John Muir, the naturalist, who described, with word pictures of vivid power the scene beauties of California, the great glaciers and the southern tropics familiar to him.

"I am glad" said John Muir, "that I got to California soon enough to see the state in all its original untrammeled beauty. I have walked five hundred miles through the San 'Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys when they were one unbroken mass of golden bloom. I made my bed among the wild flowers, where the march of commerce has obliterated God's handiwork. There is not much left to us of beauty because commerce seizes upon all that it can reach that is dollarable."42

John Muir’s visit to Monterey, and his presentation to the California Federation of Women’s Clubs at the Hotel Del Monte, was mentioned in a letter Muir wrote to his daughter Helen just several days later.

Home May 26, 1909.

Darling Helen, Your letter of the 22d was received yesterday & I immediately drew a check for the sum Mr Van Dyke wants, feeling pleased that we have the privilege of obliging him after he has so kindly done so many good deeds in our anxious days of trouble.

I have been at Del Monte attending the meetings of the Women's Clubs, & much against my will had to address the whole formidable array! Think of it.

I saw all our Pacific Grove folk. They are well & comfortably situated.

I'm glad you are regaining your health so speedily & that you will write everyday, no matter how briefly.

Ever affectionately your father

John Muir

[Letter from John Muir to Helen [Muir], 1909 May 26.]43
In his fight to save the Hetch-Hetchy Valley, Muir collected the endorsement of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the California Federation of Women's Clubs, and many other State Federations of Women's Clubs, all of whom supported resolutions protesting the proposed dam. By the end of 1910, a total of 150 women's clubs nationwide, were actively involved in Muir’s effort to preserve of Hetch-Hetchy.44

These early women’s clubs campaigns, directed toward saving the Calaveras Big Trees, the redwoods of Big Basin, and Hetch-Hetchy Valley, seeded the beginning of what would become an unending wave of efforts by individual women’s clubs, and women’s club alliances throughout the West, dedicated to wildlife and wilderness preservation.44