

Elk Grove Citizen ONLINE

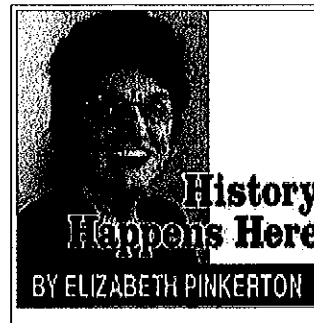
LIFESTYLE

A Super-Super Grad - Florence Polhemus Markofer

Published: Thursday, March 12, 2009 3:45 PM PDT

[Print Page](#)

In the past weeks you have read about a variety of men and women who graduated from Elk Grove schools and moved on in their lives to positions of leadership in the military, education, the arts, athletics, science, and a variety of other pursuits. They ranged in time across the 20th century. Some are well known locally, some in California and across the nation and world. Many have been outstanding providers of community service as well, giving back to others throughout their lives.



Today I am going to tell you about an outstanding graduate of the class of 1914. Her name is familiar to many because of the school that was named in her honor. But as you read about Florence Polhemus Markofer, you will be struck by the differences in the time span of her life and how we live today. And you will be amazed at the many similarities. So today, we will take a trip back to the early 1900s as a celebration of the 100 years of the Elk Grove Citizen newspaper!

Florence Polhemus Markofer was born on March 19, 1897 at the home of her parents (Edwin Ruthven Polhemus and Florence Burnett Polhemus) on Grant Line Road. Granny Witt, a local midwife who claimed that she "borned" most of the babies in Elk Grove, officiated at her birth.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Polhemus were the children of pioneers, and their daughter seemed destined to be a storyteller of their lives as well as her own. I am very grateful for Florence's willingness to pass on to us much of what we know today of Elk Grove's early days. She saved everything and shared so much of what she had and knew with anyone who was interested.

Florence was one of my early mentors of local history, and I am greatly indebted to her for sharing her many collections with me.

This is what Florence told me about herself and living in Elk Grove:

"My ancestors must have been a restless lot as my paternal grandfather came to California twice in the early days, the first time in 1849 with a group of young men. He mined the Mother Lode until he made his pile and then returned east and married Emma Kennedy. They settled in Cedar Rapids and engaged in farming. Unable to forget the Golden State, he brought his wife and baby with other family members and came west again in 1859 with a wagon train. He settled first in Johnstown (later Garden Valley), and a few years later came down to the valley where he bought a ranch on Grant Line Road. He and his wife reared a family of eight children - two boys and six girls. My father, the third child, was born in Garden Valley.

"My maternal great-grandfather brought his family to California via the Isthmus of Panama. He too made his first trip alone and later brought his wife and children, two of whom contracted fever and died. My grandfather's wife had been brought around the Horn by her aunts.

"While my forebears were so traveled, I have lived all my life in the Elk Grove area except for when I went to school in San Francisco.

"I had a pleasant childhood as my father loved to tell me stories and let me follow about on the ranch while he irrigated grape vines and milked the cows. Every summer the Indians came down from the foothills to help in the grape and hop harvest. I looked forward to this activity.

"In the fields around us, the wild flowers abounded and a favorite occupation was the picking of them. Such a variety! Poppies, bluebells, onion flowers, creamcups, baby blue eyes, larkspurs, daisies, Johnny-jump-ups, ladyslippers, forget-me-nots, tulips, red and blue shooting stars or roosterheads (as some called them - another name was cupid darts). The lovely elusive fragrance was fascinating. And I must not forget the first

to arrive – the yellow buttercups.

“As I had no brothers and sisters until I was 10 years old when my brother Burnett arrived, I was very anxious to go to school, especially as the school teacher boarded with us at this time. In fact, as the years passed, it often happened thus as my parents thought her influence was good for me in many ways.

“Although I was not six until the following March, I was allowed to attend school when the term opened in September. I was overjoyed because I loved school work but I also enjoyed the companionship of children my own age. Although some subjects appealed more than others, I have always liked to go to school. I liked the formal opening, the songs and the lesson presentations.

“We always had the pledge and the program varied with the teacher. Some had a five minute session of reciting sayings such as A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever by John Keats. A new one was put on the blackboard each morning and we memorized it. Another teacher used to have a five minute session of mental arithmetic with problems on the board and hands raised as you solved the problem. I did not shine in this area. There were nine grades in the school at one time, and the teacher coped.

“We had the opportunity of hearing what we had studied in review by the classes behind us and a glimpse of what was to come by listening to the classes ahead. The classroom atmosphere was not so permissive as nowadays. Punishments were not as severe as a rule unless the crime was great. I remember when a boy stole my hair ribbon to tease me. The teacher tied it around his head and had him stand up in front of the class.

“We attended school from nine to four with a recess both morning and afternoon and a noon hour. At these times we played all sorts of games, some out under the giant eucalyptus which are still standing along the present freeway.”

(Note from EP...: Florence attended the San Joaquin School at what is now Highway 99 and Grant Line Road.)

“The grammar school was attended by my father before me. We played Snap the Whip, ball games such as One Old Cat, Ante Over, Prisoner’s Base, Statues, tag games of various types, Jackstones and Mumblety Peg.

“At times the boys engaged in fig wars with the little hard green figs that grew on the two big fig trees in the yard. Sometimes a traveling magic lantern show came our way and gave an evening of entertainment and sometimes the bird lady brought her trained birds. At Christmas time an evening program was presented with everyone taking part and sometimes one at the closing of the school – great occasions both.

“The passing of the 7th grade and 8th grade examinations was required for entrance into the local high school. I remember our 7th grade one was given at the Victory Grammar School and students from surrounding schools went there to take it. That was scary enough but when our time came to take the 8th grade one, we had to go to Sacramento. This occurred because we happened to be the last to attend grammar school for nine years so we were members of the last 9th grade. An examination was given at mid-term in Sacramento and our teacher drilled us for this with the idea of giving the rest of the term to the other classes.

“So we took our test in the city. Then another family with last year students came to our district and he had to train another group after all. We spent our time helping the little ones and reviewing our work. Ever since this time, there have been eight grades or, as now in some districts, a junior high.

“How thrilled I was to enter Elk Grove Union High School! It did not matter that I was a lowly freshman. The faculty consisted of the principal, Philip B. Smith, and three lady teachers. If I remember correctly, our freshman class contained 25 students –three boys and 22 girls. By the time we were seniors, there were only five girls to be graduated in 1914.”

To be continued ...

1. History Happened Here, Book 1-River, Oaks, Gold – \$20
2. History Happened Here, Book 2-Fields, Farms, Schools – \$20
3. Images of America-Elk Grove – \$20

4. We the People, A Story of Internment in America – \$30

Tax is included ... \$3 for shipping 1-2 books. You can purchase all four books for \$70, a savings of \$20. Add \$6 for shipping, and remember that all proceeds go for scholarships. Make your check payable to Laguna Publishers, tell me to whom you want the books signed, and send your order to me at P.O. Box 692, Elk Grove, CA 95759. Call me at 916-685-0606 or 916-205-1267 if you have any questions – or email me at elizabethpink@gmail.com.

Copyright © 2009 - Elk Grove Citizen

[x] Close Window