

Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan
Livermore City Historian



Alma Henry and Her Book

Thursday night a week ago, Philip and Chris Henry met with me at the Livermore Library to share information about the Henry family. At one point Philip handed me an old book with a fraying cover of stained muddy brown, about 6 by 9½ inches. The title, stamped in gold on the cover, was *The Graduate School Days*. Both Henry and Chris looked at me with smiles, waiting for me to open it. They knew I would like the contents. The dedication read “to Alma Henry, from Mother.” I learned that this book was not about graduate school, but a record of her senior year in high school, 1921-1922. Alma McBride Henry was the sister of Maitland and Lois Henry, two people who I wrote about last week. She was the aunt of Philip and the great-aunt of Chris Henry.

Across from the dedication page there was a black and white photo of Alma Henry, wearing a long, full plaid skirt and a white blouse with a lacy collar. She wore a dark-colored jacket, black cotton stockings, and tie shoes with a small heel. Her hair was combed back from her forehead. She was squinting a little behind her glasses in the sun. She was not smiling—perhaps this was because her father had died suddenly the year before. She attended Livermore High at its original site on Eighth Street, now the site of the Bothwell Arts Center. She included

several photos of the original wooden building taken by E.J. Lawless. In other informal shots, girls are looking out the second story windows and sitting on the fire escape. The five boys and 15 girls in the class of 1922 were shown in a large photo with their advisor, Miss Minnie Snorin. The class officers were Margaret Rasmussen, president; Pearl Hansen, vice president; and Catherine Armstrong, secretary. Class colors were pink and silver, and their flower was the carnation.

The book is illustrated throughout by small black and white photos, each of them about 1¼ by 2¾ inches. From the frequency of these photos, I would guess that Alma had her own camera. A Kodak Brownie box camera only cost about \$3 in 1921. After the class photo, she had roughly 53 of the little photos of her classmates in various poses. One of Gladys Hansen showed her in the P.E. uniform—mid-dy blouse and bloomers—playing tennis. Ordinary school wear for girls was similar to the clothes Alma wore in the first photo of herself. The boys wore long narrow pants without an ironed crease, high top lace shoes, a white shirt, a jacket, tie, and hat. Most of the hats were soft caps, but a few had a hat with a brim. Alma added photos of the principal, Herbert Lee, and some of her teachers, including May Nissen.

There are several pages

with information about the Dramatic Club, evidently one of Alma’s main interests. She was not an actor in the first two plays of the year, but in February she had a major role as the narrator of a pantomime. The senior play, “Green Stockings” opened on the Sweeney Opera House stage on April 29. Two teachers, Bess Monahan and May Nissen, directed the play. It was a three-act comedy, in which Alma played a major role, that of Aunt Ida. Alma described the character—Aunt Ida had a quick temper, but was warmhearted. A woman of about 50 years, she became hysterical in the second act and in the third she became intoxicated. The newspaper review said, “Alma Henry did some clever acting. ... By skillful use of a large purple hat with which she developed progressively ludicrous effects, and by facial expression worthy of a movie character actress she kept her audience tremendously entertained.” Several days later, the seniors also gave the play at the Arroyo Sanitarium. The Sanitarium’s director, Dr. Chesley Bush, wrote to Alma’s mother: “Just a note to let you know that your daughter Alma made quite a hit at the sanatorium last night. I did not realize that you had any actors in your family, but Alma with a little sherry in the third act took down the house.”

Alma headed the Red Cross Society for the senior class. Various Red



Pictured is the Henry family in 1936 (from left, back) Maitland, Harold, their mother Edna, Kenneth and Lois; (front) Julian, Alma, Raymond and Alan.

Photo courtesy of Philip Henry

Cross groups in Livermore, including the one at the high school, filled 180 boxes with clothes and other goods for the children of Europe. Livermore High’s group visited the Arroyo Sanitarium and brought the children Easter baskets; later they sold candy to raise money for their cause at a dance. They sent Valentines to the disabled veterans at the U.S. Marine Hospital in San Francisco. Alma glued an envelope in her book containing two replies she received from the marines.

She was also a member of the Debating Society; the first debate was held in November. The two captains were Alma and Matt Jergenson. The question was “Will disarmament end wars?” Alma’s team

of three argued for the affirmative, but her side lost. Another question in a later debate was “Should high school boys have military training?” The negative side won again. These two questions and Alma’s work with the Red Cross show the students’ concerns about war—the First World War ended in late November 1918. Still another debate addressed the question “Should our school enter into athletic contests with other schools?” On this occasion the affirmative side, led by Alma, won.

Next week’s column will continue with Alma’s book—classes, special programs, athletics, and then the winding down of her senior year.

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When Alma Henry entered her senior year in 1921, she decided to take English, Geometry, Chemistry, and Physical Education classes. Geometry was her hardest class: "I have to study it more than anything else. I think this is one of the reasons why I like it the best; it takes real study to get a good mark in it." She said that the senior class was divided into two sections for math—one was advanced and the other slower. She said, "I am lucky enough to be in the advanced section. I have to stay there, too, because I must get a "2" in math to make either college or normal."

The term "normal" meant a state teacher's college. The two report cards she included show that she did manage "2—" both semesters for geometry. She did not receive "1" in any classes except for Physical Education; the rest of her grades were "2." In their system, "1" meant "exceptional scholarship; "2" meant "recommended for university entrance."

The first football game of the season was on September 24 at Concord. Livermore was not expected to win, so the Livermore team and the fans who made the trip were very happy when the game ended in their favor, 31 to 7. Alma kept notes on all the games, especially including the feats of her two younger brothers, Ray and Alan Henry. The first string football players were Joe Schenone, Willard Allen, Butch Martin, Ed Rasmussen, Harold Wright, Alan Henry, Bill Bonetti, Joe Grana, Ray Henry (captain), Harold Lawless, and Bill McGlinchey, quarterback. Alma included two photos of the first game and also a photo of the team, which named all the players. They were wearing leather helmets, typical of that era. In October the team played against Hayward, Fremont, and Centerville. Livermore won the first two games,

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Alma Henry and Her Book, Part 2



Alma Henry at the high school. in 1921.

Photo courtesy of Philip Henry.

13-14. Ray Henry, one of the halfbacks, scored two touchdowns against Fremont. That game was played here at home on the rodeo grounds. Livermore also played against Piedmont and Tracy.

Alma made notes about the girls' intramural volleyball and baseball games. The boys' basketball season started on December 14 against Tracy. Alan and Ray Henry were the two guards, Bill Bonetti the center, Al Simoni and Bill McGlinchey the forwards. The boys played San Juan (a Hercules club), Santa Clara Prep, Dublin, Hayward, Piedmont, and Turlock. On their way to play San Juan on January 20, one of the cars carrying part of the team had an accident. Joe Grana and Bill Bonetti both got black eyes, but there were no other injuries. The girls' basketball team played the

Livermore town team twice, winning both times. At Stanford in April, track members from all over California took part; Ray Henry was the only person from Livermore who placed—he took second in the 100 and 440. Baseball season started on April 22. The team played Berkeley High, Tracy, and Centerville.

On November 2, the high school put on a show at the Bell Theater

on First Street to raise money to pay off the debt on the football uniforms; any money left over went into the athletic funds. The school entertainment, performed before and after the motion pictures, included numbers by the orchestra. In 1921 Louis Sachau formed a high school orchestra. Alma named the members of the group, but she was not one. At the program for Washington's Birthday, they played "America" and "The Star Spangled Banner." The school also held programs for Theodore Roosevelt's birthday, Lincoln's Birthday, and a program that celebrated Arbor Day and Luther Burbank's birthday. Alma said, "Mr. Sachau's orchestra this year has been very successful. They have played at school doings and were thought very good."

Near the beginning

of her book, Alma glued in squares of fabric. The first, a light purple with small white polkadots, called dotted Swiss, was from her graduation dress. The next page had two squares—one a coral color and the other a coral lace. The dress made from these fabrics was for the Senior Ball. The long sleeves were made of the lacy material. The lace also covered the solid fabric of the skirt. The sash was a black silk ribbon, decorated with small roses made from the coral fabric. Mrs. R.A. Hansen sent Alma a pair of white silk stockings to wear to the ball. On May 20 the ball was held at the Sweeney Opera House. The class had spent two weeks working on decorating the hall with tissue paper and almond boughs. Tissue paper almond blossoms were twisted into the boughs so that they looked like real spring blooms. The stage featured baskets of ferns and climbing white roses. Alma said, "We had a large crowd. Everyone was dressed in their very best array. In every way it was a successful dance."

Commencement exercises were held on June 8, 1922, also at Sweeney's Opera House. Alma presented a talk at commencement about the history of the class. They had started as 52 freshmen; they ended with 20 graduates.

Who was Alma Henry? No one really important in the history of the world. But she kept a wonderful record of her senior year for us to enjoy. She went on to San Jose State Normal School and became an elementary school teacher. She married Roy Rasmussen in 1928 and moved to Saticoy, a small town near Ventura. After her husband's death in 1949, she moved to Pleasanton, where she taught in local elementary schools until her retirement. She died in 1994.

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