



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California
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History Pageant, 1933

by Gilbert P. Gia

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The Depression was hard on many Bakersfield families, and in November 1933 the PTA staged an history pageant to buy milk and shoes for needy children.¹ Three hundred people took part in that show, and ticket sales filled the seats of Griffith Stadium as well as the hundreds of chairs set up around the field.²

PIONEERS OF VALLEY WILL MEET TONIGHT

Tonight the third of a series of "pioneer nights" will be held at Hotel El Tejon, to which all pioneers of the southern San Joaquin valley are bidden. The "open house" gatherings are being held in connection with preparations for a community-wide pageant in November, under auspices of Bakersfield Council of Parents and Teachers, with the co-operation of civic and service units of the county.

At the pioneer night meetings Mrs. Lorene Wiswell Wilson, writer and director of the pageant, is meeting the "old timers." In this manner the material of her production is obtaining a richer background, and the residents of a long period are enjoying the opportunity of evenings of reminiscence and fellowship. Tonight Mrs. Wilson will be assisted in receiving by members of the United Daughters of Confederacy.

Lorene Wiswell Wilson was writer and director

Historical figures included Father Garces, Jedediah Smith, John Fremont, Kit Carson, Edward M. Kern, Alexis Godey, and General Beale, but some old pioneers played themselves, and other prominent Kern County citizens took part as Indians, shepherders, bandits, and soldiers." Five hundred children in pastel frocks represented fields of wild flowers, and their dance was called "one of the most impressive and lovely in the entire spectacle."³

Golden Harvests

Bakersfield Californian, Oct 24, 1933

The honorary pageant committee includes: Perry Britte, chairman of the board of supervisors; Alfred Harrell; J. R. Gist, mayor; B. F. Stinson, president of the city board of trustees; T. N. Harvey, president of the high school board; H. A. Spindt, principal of the high school; H. L. Healy, county superintendent; L. E. Chenoweth, city superintendent; A. C. Dimon, president of the Bakersfield Community theater; William Ewert, president of the Kern County Historical Society.

Other Committeemen

L. B. Nourse, secretary of the County Chamber of Commerce; W. L. Landsborough, secretary of the Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce; Charles W. Ople, president of the Ministerial Union; John L. Henderson, county librarian; Rabbi B. H. Cohen, of the Congregation B'Nai Jacob; Miss Grace Bird, vice-principal of the local high school and dean of junior college; Mrs. Walker Rankin, past president of the Seventh District P. T. A.; the Rev. Father A. C. Stuhlman, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, and Mrs. Andrew Hancock, president of the Seventh District P. T. A.

Scene after scene unfolded. Keyville's gold rush was shown as the "jumping of a claim, shooting, gambling, and more shooting." The wedding of Miss Sarah Bohna and Dr. Sparrell Woody was performed by 26 members of the Bohna family, and the Business and Professional Women's Club did the arrival of Thomas Baker's family from Visalia. The Camp Fire Girls and Roosevelt School pupils played Col. Baker's children and their classmates. High school Faculty Wives recreated scenes from the life of Gen. Edward Beale, but the club also presented cameos of people who are generally not known today.

More acts followed. Forty-seven high school girls did the "Flame Dance," Native Daughters of the Golden West staged a Spanish fiesta, and a Miss Orr, who had lived for many years at an Indian school, assisted 40 residents of Tejon Canyon in a scene depicting Native American life. Daughters of the American Revolution staged a George Washington Tea Party, Oscar Rudnick arranged a cattle scene, and local Chinese residents depicted the coming of the railroad. The PTA's pageant also included an early Protestant service, a May Day picnic, a peddler peddling his wares, a high-wheel bicycle demonstration by Vincent Clerou, and several old-fashioned dances with music by the Kern River Outlaws. After dancing came a processional of choirs.

The pageant was in its third hour when Miss Annie Beardsley of Taft performed the dance of old-time oil rigs, which in turn was followed by girls of Taft High School who danced with "finesse and grace" the economic slump of 1930 and the miracle of the National Recovery Act.

The sun set "in golden splendor" as the pageant concluded with The Golden Harvest which began with Jefferson School pupils in white costumes performing the Dance of the Cotton Bolls. When they left the stage, two rows of 14 school children came forward carrying daisy chains of fresh flowers. Between the garland-lanes filed the Kern County pioneers while at the same moment the sound of the Coronation March began. Hundreds of high schoolers bearing fruit

and sheaves of wheat then rose up as a backdrop behind the honored elders.

The PTA bought much milk and and many pairs shoes, but the pageant affected the community in more permanent ways for many years.

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1 Those in the planning of the event were named in the Oct 24, 1933 Bakersfield Californian, p 7, "P.T.A. Milk and Shoe Benefit To Be Given Next Month."

2 Some accounts said 3000 people took part. In the late 1970s Grace V. Bird, former Dean of Bakersfield Jr. College, attributed the pageant's success to KCUHS Principal Thomas Nelson (1937-38). Bird said, "He sought to bring together the people of this community and those of the secondary schools and the college by presenting a huge pageant of Kern County history. Hundreds took part in it in one way or another. It evoked applause from all areas." (Volume I, Grace V. Bird, Leader in Junior College Education at Bakersfield and the University of Californian." Regional Oral History office, Bancroft Library, U of California, Berkeley, California, 1978, p 55) However, Nelson did not come to Kern County until summer 1938 (Bakersfield Californian, May 14, 1938). Probably, Bird meant to say Herman A. Spindt. he was principal of KCUHS in 1933 and was an history enthusiast. Mrs. Lorene Wiswell Wilson of Long Beach wrote and directed the pageant. (Bakersfield Californian, Oct 11, 24, 1933)