The Woman Who Made Whittier Strong

Harriet Russell Strong

Achievements

◊ First President of the Wildflower Club
◊ First woman on the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce
◊ Vice President of the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra
◊ Founding President of the Ebell Club in Los Angeles
◊ Board member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic
◊ Member of the Friday Morning Club
◊ Member of the Ruskin Art Club of Los Angeles
◊ Founder of the First Christian Science Church of Whittier
◊ Member of the International Waterways Association of San Francisco
◊ Whittier representative of the Los Angeles Flood Control Association
◊ Spoke before Congress about water conservation
◊ One of the first to advocate bringing water from the Colorado River to Los Angeles
◊ Founded a women’s Republican group called The Hamilton Club of America
◊ Founder of the Business League of America
◊ First female member of the Board of Trustees for USC Law School
◊ Delegate in the 1920 Republican National Convention
◊ Member of the National American Women Suffrage Association and traveled with Susan B. Anthony
◊ In 1931, after her death, construction began on the Hoover Dam using ideas that Strong had presented in 1917
◊ Elected to the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 2001

Strong’s ideas used on the Hoover Dam helped to bring water to Southern California

Environ of letter to Harriet Strong

Entrance to “Rancho del Fuerte” surrounded by pampas grass

Harriet Russell Strong’s home in Whittier

Whittier Historical Society

July 23, 1844—September 16, 1926

Whittier Museum: 6755 Newlin Ave, Whittier, CA 90601
Phone: (562)-945-3871
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Whittier Historical Society

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Harriet was also instrumental in saving Pio Pico Mansion. She implemented a plan to restore the mansion to its original glory on May 16, 1915, which established the mansion and its surrounding grounds as a museum protected by the state.

Harriet Russell Strong accomplished a number of amazing things throughout her life. Not only did she raise four daughters on her own, but she also managed to maintain a ranch, patent five different inventions, and help advocate both water conservation and women’s rights. Sadly, on a trip back to her ranch in September of 1926, Harriet Russell Strong was involved in a fatal car accident.

Harriet Russell Strong is an important woman in Whittier’s history. Not only has she been labeled “The Walnut Queen” and “The Pampas Woman,” but she is also well known for her five patents, which include a design for a water irrigation system.

For the following 10 years, Harriet had to fight to keep control of the ranch from business partners, while at the same time, raise her four daughters. In order to deal with all of the legal fees and debts left by Charles, Harriet needed to find a means of earning money. In search of a stable crop, Harriet came upon walnuts. Walnuts require constant moisture in order to thrive, so Harriet designed an irrigation system to provide her walnut grove constant moisture. Additionally, she build artesian wells and installed a pumping plant to sustain her crops. In order to maintain a steady flow of capital to run “Rancho del Fuerte” while waiting for the walnuts to mature, Harriet began planting pampas grass. Harriet used the pampas plumes to embellish women’s hats and decorate department store entry ways. Additionally, it was used as the Republican National Committee’s national emblem in 1892. On her ranch, she profitably grew and sold English walnuts, oranges, pampas grass, and pomegranates.

In less than five years, Harriet rescued her family from destitution by paying off her husband’s debts and supporting herself and her daughters. Once that was taken care of, Harriet continued to push forward with her ideas for water irrigation and eventually became an advocate for water conservation. In 1917, she went before Congress and presented a plan that she had designed to dam the Colorado River. Harriet was also a member of numerous clubs and was an advocate of women’s rights. In fact, for the last 17 years of her life, Harriet traveled to numerous places to speak on behalf of women’s education and the push to get women more economically secure.